



PAINTING OF GUGE (SIXTEENTH CENTURY)  
RATNASAMBHAVA

*Frontispiece*

# SECRETS OF TIBET

Being the Chronicle of the Tucci Scientific  
Expedition to Western Tibet (1933)

BY

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AND

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To Csoma de Körös  
Pioneer of Tibetan Studies  
On the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth





## PREFACE

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Young, who in 1912 visited for the first time Tsaparang, the ancient capital of the kings of Guge, thus concludes his narrative, the first and up to the present the only one which describes Tsaparang and Toling with amplitude of detail: "Enough however is known of the past of Toling and Tsaparang to stimulate further curiosity which can only be satisfied by the despatch of a competent Tibetan expert to both places with full permission to study their antiquities at leisure, and to hunt for inscriptions. . . . There is still much to be learnt of the great age of Toling, when its golden monastery radiated light and learning through all Tibet from Kashmir to Assam: of the history of Guge between the eleventh and the seventeenth centuries, of which we know nothing but the occasional record of a successful invasion or levy of tribute by Ladakh: and lastly of the rise of the Tsaparang dynasty, its conquests and splendour, and its dramatically sudden fall."<sup>1</sup>

But unfortunately Young's words remained for a long time without an echo. Western Tibet closed its doors, and no student succeeded in crossing the frontier with the definite intention of investigating its ruins, exploring its temples and collecting the memorials and the traditions of its past glories.

<sup>1</sup> "A Journey to Toling and Tsaparang in Western Tibet" in *Journal of the Panjab Historical Society*, Vol. VII, n. 2, p. 177.

It is true that Tsaparang excited in the meantime the interest of scholars, not indeed as the capital of a dynasty once historically important, but as the centre of a Christian community founded there by the mission of the Portuguese Andrade. Francke even believed that he had found a record of the apostasy of the King of Guge in some inscriptions in Spiti which I, however, have not succeeded in tracing and which perhaps in the interval have been destroyed or have otherwise perished. It has even been asserted that the King was baptized by Andrade. We shall see how slight has been the foundation on which these statements have been based; the founding of the Christian community of Tsaparang is a trivial episode in the history of Western Tibet and certainly there no longer remains any trace of it, not even that of which Young makes mention, and which Wessels repeats. The interest inspired by Tsaparang has quite a different origin.

My studies on Western Tibet, and especially on one of the most conspicuous figures of Lamaism, that is to say *Rin c'en bzang po*, without a doubt the greatest personality of which that country even to-day can boast, have led me, by another way, to the same conclusions at which Young arrived, concerning the importance of this country in the history of Lamaism.

The Tibetan sources of information which I have studied showed in fact, in an indisputable manner, that the rebirth of Buddhism in the country of the snows around Mille was indeed due to the wonderful activity of the venerable apostle whose life I have recalled, and to the enlightened liberality of the kings of Guge, who, inviting from India the most illustrious masters of their time, as it were transplanted into Tibet the doctrines and the practices of *Mahāyāna*.

Tibetan chroniclers and historians agree in recognizing the important part played by Western Tibet and its kings in the revival of Buddhism after the persecution of *gLañ darma*.

The sources of information speak not only of pundits and doctors invited to the court of the kings of Guge or having taken refuge there, in a period which marks the decline of fortune for Buddhism in India, but also of artists, especially from Kashmir, who introduced there the Indian traditions. One had to seek in the valleys of the Himalayas the confirmation of this information, preserved in manuscripts as literary tradition, and connect together the links of the chain of thought which, stretching from Mille, united India and Tibet.

It was necessary to gather together manuscript, artistic and epigraphic material, not only to reconstruct the political history of a dynasty the importance of which became the more distinct as it was investigated, but also to shed light on the religious evolution of the country, on its real contribution to Lamaism, and on the artistic schools which developed there. It was necessary also to reconstruct the geographical history of the country, for the sources recorded places, not mentioned on modern maps, which must at one time have been of extreme importance, if they had been the scene of the great events associated with their names or had possessed temples and palaces of such high repute.

It seemed to me also necessary to extend the research to Spiti which was once a province governed by the kings of Guge; that province had been studied, it is true, from the historical and archæological point of view, by Francke in his expedition of 1909. But my three preceding journeys through Ladakh, Rupshu and Lahul, and the knowledge that I had of the works of Francke,

had shown me that there was need to revise many of the conclusions arrived at by that pioneer.

One cannot deny to Francke the credit for having directed the attention of scholars to many aspects, hitherto ignored, of Tibetan history and archæology; he was an enthusiastic and tireless worker to whom we owe works which will remain, for a long time, fundamental. But unfortunately he was deficient in that intimate comprehension of *realia*, without which it is difficult to understand fully the significance of Tibetan literature and art; he had had neither the means nor the time to acquire that Buddhist culture and that profound and direct knowledge of India and its civilization without which it becomes difficult to understand and assess many of the cultural and historical manifestations of Tibet.

It therefore seemed to me necessary to explore again the province of Spiti in order to complete and verify the conclusions reached by Francke.

With these ends in view I submitted for the approval of the Royal Academy of Italy a programme of travel in Western Tibet, in which I set out what I intended to do. Through the enlightened intervention of the Head of the Government, the programme was accepted and I received the order to prepare and organize the expedition, to the expenses of which there contributed: the Royal Marine, the Bank of Italy, the Society for Subventions on Industrial Values, Comm. L. De Santis, the National Fascist Federation of Public Works, the National Fascist Confederation of Agriculturists, the Savings Bank of Milan, and the General Fascist Confederation of Italian Industry.

But I should not have been able to set out and to carry my research to its conclusion if I had not had the powerful co-operation of the English authorities in India,

who have, on repeated occasions, shown their interest in my journeys, and whose sympathetic collaboration I had once again to enlist.

Through the Foreign Secretariat, I succeeded in obtaining, subject to certain conditions, for the observation of which I had to render myself morally responsible, permission to cross the Tibetan frontier and to visit Western Tibet, for the purposes I had in mind, as far as Toling and Tsaparang; the extreme limit was to be Gartok the capital of Western Tibet.

The permit said nothing about the possibility of visiting monasteries, which manifestly were the places which it was imperative to study and photograph; indeed we were prohibited from entering them without the authorization of the local authorities. That therefore depended solely on fortune and on the welcome we should receive from the Lamas. I, however, placed great faith in my knowledge not only of the Tibetan language, but also of the psychology and the religious literature of the people. Experience, now extensive, has shown me that the Tibetans, who are more suspicious the more ignorant they are, become good friends and open their minds without reserve when one shows oneself respectful towards their religious affairs, which at bottom represent the greatest spiritual heritage in which they can pride themselves.

Acquaintance with the language and its dialects does not suffice; one must know how to secure the confidence of the people, how to give them the impression that there is a spiritual affinity between the visitor and themselves; one must abandon at the frontiers of their land that European arrogance of which it is so difficult to rid oneself. I presented myself in the guise of a disciple, even if the conversation on abstruse themes of theology

and metaphysics—when I found monks capable of understanding me—showed that I was no novice; I bowed before statues, I recited formulas of prayer in the austere silence of sacristies, I devoutly kindled votive lamps on altars, greatly to my advantage, and I raised above my head with the utmost respect every book or statue which was offered to me.

They talked to me at the frontier of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of entering Rabgyeling and Toling; and I remembered as a matter of fact that Sven Hedin was not allowed even to draw near to the sacred place, and that he was obliged to camp at some distance from the monastery.

To me, on the contrary, every door was opened; there has not been an object of artistic value which, with full consent of the authorities, I have not succeeded in studying with all ease and in photographing; there is not a book or manuscript—still in existence—which has not been examined with the most scrupulous care or copied. The most important and most secret churches, like the *gSer k'an*, which not even Young succeeded in seeing, were explored in their most minute details.

I need not insist on the immense importance of the photographic material collected; all the interiors of the temples with their wonderful frescoes have been illustrated in clear photographs which, worthily reproduced, will see the light in the Indo-Tibetan series published by the Royal Academy of Italy.<sup>1</sup> These pictures which they reproduce not only throw much light on the art of Guge, but, interpreted with the assistance of the

<sup>1</sup> The third volume of *Indo-Tibetica*, to be published very shortly, contains the illustrations of the temples of Spiti and high Kunāvar and the interpretation of the mural paintings which they contain. The fourth, dedicated to Tsaparang, is already written and will follow after a short interval; the fifth will be on Toling and the minor temples.

mystic and liturgical literature by which they are inspired, form a magnificent iconographical guide and the best key for the understanding of the symbolism of the religion of the Lamas. The carelessness with which the temples are kept, the storms and the years leave no doubt that these wonderful monuments of a great past will in a short time exist only as heaps of ruins. The work of destruction has already begun in many places; the erosion due to the Sutlej, cutting deeper and deeper, threatens even Toling, and some rows of *mc'od rten*, which surrounded the temple, are already overthrown. All the territory from Rabgyeling to Shangtze and Shang and then from Gartok to Toling is strewn with ruins where there is never a shadow of life; a great past even the traces of which are being lost for ever.

Even if occasional travellers—and from what I know they have been few—have preceded me into Western Tibet, there is no doubt that no one of them has pursued the same ends as I have set for myself or has taken the trouble to study the country from the historical, archæological and epigraphical point of view.

This chronicle, as the name indicates, does not profess to be other than a diary of the journey, as exact as possible; it does not enter into particulars, which will be done instead in the scientific volumes in which the materials collected—epigraphic, iconographic, artistic, manuscript, folklore and prehistoric—will be studied, set forth and interpreted with the help of the various literary sources—Tibetan, Sanskrit and Chinese—which will serve to illuminate it better.

This chronicle has no literary pretensions; it aims at being the exact documentation of a scientific journey, and a kind of guide for those who, in the future, may



betake themselves to this same country pursuing a quest similar to that which I proposed to myself.

It bears my name and that of Dr. Gherzi, medical captain in the Royal Marine, who has been the best of companions and most helpful of collaborators; to him belongs all the credit for the magnificent photographic documentation of which I have spoken.

He usually wrote the diary day by day, I the rest; but of course I hold myself responsible for all that is written in this book.

In the orthography of the geographical names I have adopted that of the Survey, in order to facilitate the identification of them, but, where it has been possible, I have given for every place the Tibetan name which I have found on inscriptions or in manuscripts.

As will be seen in this volume, after leaving Tsaparang we returned by way of the Sutlej and the state of Bashahr.

It will be profitable in a second journey to investigate, following the same procedure, the other route, that is to say, that which from Almora goes to Gartok passing through Mana or Niti—the same as that taken by Andrade. I hope, if there do not fail me the interest of the Head of the Government who has rendered possible my expedition, the strong support of the Royal Academy of Italy and the consent of the English authorities in India, to be able at a not distant day to carry to a conclusion my researches and thus complete the organic study of Western Tibet, which I have been pursuing for years.

GIUSEPPE TUCCI.

# SECRETS OF TIBET

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*13th June.*

**I**N the torrid afternoon of 13th June, whilst the little Pathankot train is climbing painfully towards the heights, we catch our first glimpse of the snow; the superb ridges of the chain of the Dhaoladhār emerge like celestial islands from the thick obscurity which at sunset mantles the horizon with a tremulous haze. To obtain a little coolness we seat ourselves on the steps of the carriages; a proceeding quite without danger, for the speed of the train, on account of the excessive steepness of the ascent, is less than walking pace.

The little stations are all alike in form and colour, and all are crowded, as if everywhere it was market-day; perambulating vendors offer thirsty and weary travellers blackish fritters, bananas, beer and soda-water. But drink we cannot: the bottles kept under that sun for the whole day are almost boiling. Of ice, not the barest idea. Indians do what can be done to render harder and more cruel existence in a country where for the greater part of the year living is synonymous with suffering. It seems incredible to see the snow now and to be suffering torture under a temperature of 45° C.; even Chankù, the Tibetan mastiff who has already taken part in all Tucci's previous expeditions, is unusually docile and tranquil; one may stroke him without running the risk of getting bitten. The heat has conquered his habitual ferocity.

A little after sunset we arrive at Palanpur (Kangra); to the desolate expanses of sand, baked by the sun, dotted here and there by a certain prickly bush and by sparse little yellowed trees, succeed marvellous woods of conifers and green meadows. No longer the sultry, heavy atmosphere of the Indian plain, but a mild air laden with the strong odour of resin. By means of a lorry we transport all our boxes and the vast equipment of the expedition from the station to the bungalow, beyond the village, in the depth of the wood. Bungalows are a providential institution of the English Government; on all the motor roads, and on many of the distant caravan routes, are to be found these pleasing and convenient walled structures, having two or three rooms, furnished with all that is necessary to afford comfortable lodging to the traveller. The first evening in the bungalow is delicious; we are able to sleep on a bed without the overpowering clatter of the train.

*14th June.*

At six in the morning departure for Sultanpur, with a lorry ramshackle and laden up to the possible limit with all our baggage. We get our first thrills: the carriage races down the tortuous street like a drunk creature; reels, creaks, pants, vomits water from the radiator a good thirty times. Even the few monkeys we meet, at the sight of such a monster, flee in terror to the topmost branches of the trees. Towards midday we arrive at the frontier of the little state of Mandi, pay the dues and enter the city. We try to breakfast in the bungalow, but confronted with sloppy fish and hot soda-water we have to remain hungry, and with empty stomachs we resume our journey towards Sultanpur, accompanied by the infernal row of our vehicle. With the heedlessness of



WOODEN BRIDGE OVER THE BIĀS AT SULTANPUR



THE BAZAAR AT SULTANPUR



PEOPLE OF SPITI



A TIBETAN PILGRIM

danger shown by the sleep-walker the man at the wheel of this contraption of ours races along like a madman, close to the edge of the road, which is hewn out of the rock and is bounded by a precipitous drop to the bed of the River Biās. The bursting of a tyre would be enough to send us rolling into the river in company with our forty-two cases. With a certain relief we arrive towards evening at Sultanpur, where we find the three Kashmir servants, the head caravan driver Kalīl, the cook Abdūl, and Sheikh, the man of all work. All three are veterans in expeditionary experience; Kalīl has taken part in the German expedition to Nanga-Parbat and has climbed to 7000 metres; Abdūl, who is a *shikari*, has often been in Turkistan and Central Asia and has even penetrated as far as the borders of China. We unload for the last time the cases of material and foodstuffs, which have to be rearranged for the next departure as a caravan.

Sultanpur (Kulu) is a large village situated in the depths of the valley of the Biās, in the middle almost of the last offshoots of the Pirpanjāl, over the slopes of which straggles in disorderly fashion a thick forest of pines and firs which is dying under the glaciers and the snow-clad peaks. For its own particular situation Sultanpur is one of the most fertile districts in India; English planters have really transformed the forests of the valley into magnificent orchards and opulent fruit-groves which produce the finest quality of foliage and fruit. The sole drawback which impedes the future development of the country is represented by the difficult communications with the plains, for the road, forced to follow the course of the River Biās, is long and dangerous and, during the rainy season, is often blocked by landslips. As the crow flies, the distance between Jhatingri and

Sultanpur is short; the two valleys are separated by a pass—the Bhabu—which although not very high is not adapted to heavy traffic; only a tunnel and the extension of the Kangra railway could give to the country a brilliant agricultural future.

From the first day we are occupied in organizing the caravan, in checking the material brought from Italy and that acquired in India; we see that food-stuff is distributed uniformly among the various cases, so that each one contains all that is necessary for fifteen days; examine and test the tents, small beds and all the accessories of a camp; rearrange the photographic, cinematographic and sanitary equipment. We know very well the ruggedness of the land which we have to traverse and the difficulty of finding transport; for that reason we take the utmost care to reduce everything to the lowest minimum.

Every day we go to the village bazaar which, the last towards the frontier, is relatively well stocked; these frontier bazaars are usually more interesting than others because of the great variety of types one may meet there; most elegant in their simple tunics of coarse wool the Tibetan shepherds, who with their flocks transport wool and mineral salt, to barter in the markets of the frontier for flour, tea and manufactured goods; monks, young and old, clad in red wool faded with sun and rain, wander about with an air of amazed admiration amongst the little shops of the bazaar. For them, accustomed to the boundless desert expanses of the Tibetan plateaus and the impenetrable and perilous heights, these bazaars, which Europe and Japan in particular flood with their most varied products, are like a first and fascinating glimpse of the West and its magical and demoniacal allurements.

Some of these pilgrims come from far distant Kham and have crossed the whole of Tibet on foot, carrying on their shoulders a little bundle held together with interwoven laths; a very heavy covering of wool, some copper pans, wooden cups, an extra pair of shoes, some packets of tea, salt, soda and barley meal and a prayer-mill; sometimes they have also the double drum (*ḍāmaru*) and a trumpet made from the left thigh-bone of a girl of sixteen years (*rkañ gliñ*, pronunciation *kanlñ*). These are instruments necessary for the ceremonies of exorcism, but they serve also to inspire in the superstitious people a holy dread of the one supposed to be capable of calling forth mysterious forces, and they therefore render begging a lucrative source of income; suspended from the neck is a small box of silver and brass containing little images and sacred relics, without which no Tibetan would risk setting out on a journey.

There is never wanting a sacred book, which, containing in the symbol of the word the Divine revelation, is an infallible talisman in the risks of long and dangerous wanderings.

One only needs to stroll about in the bazaars of Sultanpur to realize that one is in a border country. People and dialects mix and confuse one another; alongside the natives, almost all Hindus, shepherds of Spiti, caravan drivers from Ladakh, mostly Moslems, come down to winter in the district of Sultanpur and wait for the better weather to resume with their charges and their merchandize the road to Leh; Balti with wild figures and hard features who, after having laboured at the making of roads in the Indian plain, are retracing the return journey over the long fatiguing paths of the Himalayas.

Merchants of Sultanpur are also preparing their caravans which, by way of the Baralacha, make for Leh



and thence send Indian merchandize as far as Russian and Chinese Turkistan; shepherds of Kangra in the picturesque great-coat of rough wool are driving their flocks forward towards the grassy plains of Lahul, of the valley of the Chandra and of Eastern Ladakh. Tibetan pilgrims are returning from the holy places of Buddhism: Bodhgayâ, where Sâkyamuni received the divine illumination, Benares, where he preached his first sermon, Amritsar, where a strange legend fixes the birthplace of Padmasambhava<sup>1</sup> and Mandi (Zahor of the Tibetan sources) where was born one of the two wives of this celebrated miracle-worker who converted to Buddhism wild and ignorant Tibet. Languages and dialects are mixed up together; along with Pâhâri which is the indigenous language, Urdu, Tibetan and Indî.

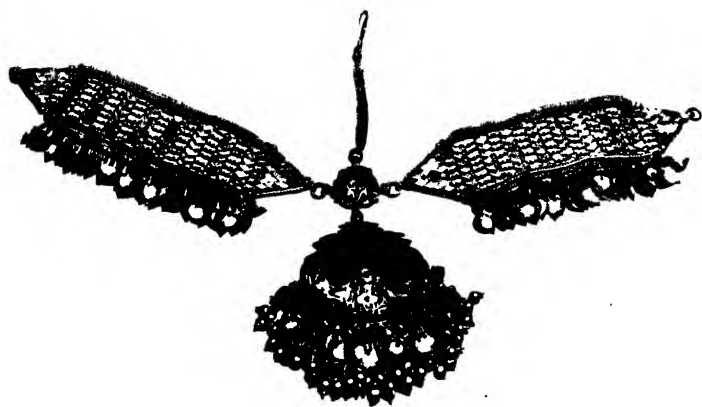
The women are fresh and beautiful. There has been a fair at Katrain. We see them returning arm-in-arm with big flowers interlaced in their very black hair. Usually they work as hard as and often harder than the men. They never remain still, and they are not as cross-grained and stubborn as in the plains. Necklaces are not numerous; generally they are too poor to adorn themselves with valuables. The usual bracelets at the wrists and circlets at the ankles: collars of coral and turquoise, and a kind of diadem in silver which falls with a large pendant over the forehead.

The richest wear in the nose a small gold plate with a garnet in the centre; they have a little hole in the left nostril in which to insert it.

<sup>1</sup> The legend is late and perhaps owes its origin to the sacred lake surrounding the "golden temple", which Tibetan pilgrims have identified as the Lake Dhanakośa, in which the great miracle-worker would be born, on a miraculous lotus-plant. But Dhanakośa was in Uḍḍiyâna, that is to say in the valley of the Svât. In any case, anyone who goes to Amritsar almost always finds pilgrims from Tibet; and in the Tibetan temples it is not rare to find photographs of the Sanctuary of Amritsar and of Guru Nânâk, who naturally is regarded as an incarnation of Padmasambhava.



SHEPHERDS OF KANGRA MAKE THEIR WAY TOWARDS  
THE PASTURES OF CHANDRA



SILVER ORNAMENT FOR A HEAD-DRESS



AN OLD WOMAN OF SULTANPUR



TALKING WITH MONKS FROM SPITI IN THE BAZAAR  
AT SULTANPUR

To the collar is often attached a kind of silver amulet which contains charms and magic formulas. It is an ornament common to all the tribes of the Himalayas and Sub-Himalayas, which run from Assam to Gilgit, and its derivation is clearly from the Tibetan *Gau*. They are of all shapes and sizes, almost always of silver, rarely of gold filigree: inset with turquoises and coral.

It is surprising the rapidity with which the news spreads, especially in the Tibetan quarter, that there has arrived a *Sahib*, who speaks and writes their language, is familiar with their religion and buys ancient objects, books and pictures. Certain monks from Spiti whom we meet in the bazaar furnish us with the first information about the route, about the quantity of snow on the pass and about the possibilities of crossing.

At the bungalow the days pass swiftly in preparations; all the material is ready, but there remains the most difficult task of all: the choice of route and the make-up of the caravan.

The passes through which we gain access to the valley of the Chandra and thence to Spiti are two: the Rohtang-la,<sup>1</sup> 3900 metres high, closed to traffic till about the 20th June, a passage relatively easy for a pony and yak caravan; the Hamtāh-la (about 4200), accessible only to caravans with porters. Tucci does not want to wait for the thawing of the Baralacha and to make for Spiti by that route which, however, is that most generally followed; not only would it cause great delay in our starting, because the pass will not be open before the middle of July, but it would lengthen our journey by about fifteen days' march through a country

<sup>1</sup> Some write Rahtang (e.g. C. G. Bruce, *Kulu and Lahul*). Our Tibetan informants would write: *Rea t'añ*. "La", as is known, means "pass" in Tibetan.

of scanty interest and one already traversed by him in his previous journeys.

*15th June.*

The porters of Jagatsukh have refused to set out by way of the Hamtāh pass, either because it appears that it is not yet possible to cross without grave danger—in fact last week two porters perished—or because during these days the grain harvest has begun, which absorbs the activity of almost the whole population. Probably, however, the true reason for their refusal is the natural indolence of these people, whom not even the proximity of the lofty mountain endows with that energy and manly resolution which, on the contrary, characterize the Tibetan population.

At one time there prevailed the system of “forced labour”; every village had to furnish, in proportion to the number of the inhabitants, a certain number of men and horses; but then, in consequence of the persistent urging of the missionaries who maintained that this imposition was tyrannical, forced labour was abolished, and now there remains only a compulsory tariff fixed by the Government for anyone who voluntarily hires himself out with a caravan. One understands the humanitarian reasons which have actuated the missionaries in their work of elevating the native tribes; but, if forced labour is an act of tyranny amongst laborious and active people, it may also be a good rule of education in work amongst people who are indolent and intolerant of discipline. The information about whether or not the Rohtang was passable is contradictory; one says it can be crossed easily, another that it cannot possibly be crossed.

After long and laborious negotiations we arrange to set out with a pony caravan and to reach Spiti by way of the Rohtang and the valley of the Chandra.

*21st June, Kelat Bridge.*

At dawn the caravan composed of twenty-four horses and seventeen men under the command of Kalil and Abdùl leaves the courtyard of the bungalow for the first stage of eighteen miles to Kelat Bridge.

We ourselves set out about two with the terrible lorry. Behold us once more at the mercy of that madman of a driver; we do indeed regret that we did not set out on foot with the caravan.

Tucci travels in the first class (a single place very close to the side of the driver); Gheri on the other hand in the second class, seated on the post-bags. More than once the passengers have to get down and push with all their strength the vehicle, which is unable to mount the short ascents at the approaches to the bridges. On every bridge is fixed a notice by which travellers are warned that, in the event of bad conditions of the planking, the administration assumes no responsibility, and people must therefore cross at their own risk and danger; but the lorry which carries eighteen people instead of twelve, and is loaded on the roof to an incredible extent with goods of all sorts, crosses the bridges at a crazy speed which gives rise to a sinister cracking and a swinging of the old timber-work which is far from reassuring. Towards 5 p.m. we arrive at Kelat Bridge. We find the camp already pitched and in excellent order on a small level space on the bank of the Biās, which on account of the recent rains races past in a swift and turbulent flood.

This is our first camp. All is in perfect order; the tents are new and clean, with their white ropes held taut by the pegs; the internal equipment is complete, with the little chairs, the table, the basin and bath of waterproof cloth; we think with terror how all this stuff

will be brought back after five months of travelling. Abdül has built up the first oven with three stones arranged in a rectangle in the shelter of an old tree, and on the cheerful fire is cooking our first caravan supper.

Towards sunset the sky becomes covered with very black storm-clouds, which, driven by the first monsoons, are being arrested by and are accumulating against the great chain of Pirpanjāl. After supper we have to hurry into the tents, for the rain pours down with sudden violence; thunder, lightning and a cyclonic wind. In the moderate warmth of the camp-bed we think with compassion of the unfortunate drivers who are squatting all night under a tree, exposed without defence to the tempest and without the comfort of a good fire. Towards 11 p.m. we both have the impression that the roar of the river has sensibly increased; it is not a continuous sound but an intermittent rumble which becomes confused with that of the thunder. The violence of the flood of river-waters shakes the earth. Towards midnight it seems to us that the water is approaching the tents; we get up to go and examine the situation. The weak light of the electric torch fails to pierce the darkness in this night of deluge.

The river is extraordinarily swollen, foaming, very rapid. We inspect the camp and we have the disagreeable surprise of finding that our tents have been pitched on an old islet which during the drought becomes part of the neighbouring fields, but in the rainy season resumes its own character. We place two drivers to mount guard at the extremities of the island with instructions to watch the level of the water and to call us in case our position grows worse. An hour later Ghersi returns to make a tour of inspection and finds the guards asleep under the rain and the water which is already beginning



A WOMAN OF LAHUL WEARING THE CHARACTERISTIC  
HEAD-DRESS



THE HEAD-DRESS, SEEN FROM BEHIND





TIBETAN PILGRIMS



ITINERANT TIBETAN LAMA

to flow in its old channel between us and the road. We decide to transfer all the baggage to the shore, leaving in place only the tents, which in case of greater danger can easily be moved across. Every hour Ghersi gets up to examine the state of things; and so comes the dawn, cold, extremely damp, sad. The drivers, wet and sleepy, load the horses again lazily. Before day breaks we are on the march for Manāli.

*22nd June, Manāli.*

In two hours we cover the two miles which separate Kelat Bridge from Manāli, the last post and telegraph office in the Panjab. The weather is still bad; black clouds and thick mist hide the mountain chain which towers over us and which we shall have to cross; also the wind increases in intensity. The monsoons have reached this region and are breaking against the barrier of the Pirpanjāl.

The information about the state of the pass is more disheartening than ever; many say that it is still closed. Our caravan men are lamenting because they can find no fodder for the animals, claim unreasonable advances of money to buy provisions, ask for an increase in the prices agreed upon, and adduce as a pretext the inclemency of the season and the difficulty of the road. It does not seem that they have serious intention of traversing the valley of the Chandra, which is rarely trodden, especially at this season and in the direction of Spiti.

As we cannot risk crossing the pass with people who show no trustworthiness but only make vague promises, in which experience teaches us we must place little faith, we resolve to dismiss these caravan men, to return to our first idea of going by Hamtāh, and to enlist, wherever possible, a great squad of carriers even at the

cost of wages higher than those fixed by Government.

Then there begin over again negotiations with the local porters.

*23rd June.*

After long persistence and much vociferating the porters accept our proposals and begin to weigh the baggage for the equal distribution of the load. Even over the weighing the discussions continue till evening. All is ready and to-morrow we ought to set out; but when the night arrives the porters, after fresh discussions amongst themselves, return to demand a new price, which is almost double that agreed upon a few hours before. Only a man who knows profoundly the mentality of these people can continue to reason with them without losing patience.

We dismiss the porters and resume bargaining with the caravan men. Other proposals, interminable discussions, oaths taken on the Koran, and finally agreement is reached, thanks to which to-morrow morning we shall set out in the direction of the pass.

At sunset, on the border of the wood, all the Moslem drivers, arranged in a semi-circle under a great pine, prostrate themselves in silence facing the west; the unknown is awaiting them. The nomad existence which they live for the sake of gain and by natural inclination leads them towards new lands. Before attempting a route, of which up till now they have heard nothing but evil, they implore the protection of the Prophet.

It is said that the valley of the Chandra cannot be traversed and that to reach Spiti it will be necessary to make a long detour by the Baralacha.

Amongst a company of pilgrims we find an itinerant Lama, hailing from the borders of China; for eight

years he has been wandering round amongst the Tibetan monasteries, and now is on a pilgrimage to Mandi and Amritsar. In features, style of speech, and costume he reminds Gherzi of the Buddhist priests whom he met two years ago in China on the borders of Szechuen. The Tibetan is a little like the Indian, travels a great deal, on foot, of course, now enjoying hospitality given with that cordial affability which is characteristic of the Orientals, now sleeping in immense solitudes which almost inspire fear. The motive of this vagabondage is not a desire for new experience; perhaps many of the places which the pilgrim passes through he does not note and does not see, so weary is he, so hungry, so absorbed in his prayers. He travels in order to acquire religious merit, to visit the holy places of the faith, to draw near to God. The pilgrimage means really detachment from life, that detachment which Oriental religions postulate as a necessary condition for the possession of God.

Tibetans are present more frequently now: it is clear that we are at the gates of Tibet. And one understands how in past centuries kings of Ladakh, princes of Spiti, and Tibetan chiefs have tried to get possession of and to dominate these routes. And there still exists at Manāli the tradition that near the temple is walled up and buried a great Buddhist library; and it is related that some ten years ago there came a Lama from Lhasa to resume possession of it, but he failed, because the magic formulas, to whose protection the library had been entrusted, were superior to his magical power.

Whilst we are in the throes of preparation for the approaching departure, Alimàs, a strolling juggler, whom hunger has driven to the very fringes of the Himalayas, presents himself in our camp clad as a Napoleonic generalissimo to display his skill. It takes little time to pre-

pare his mysterious instruments; with most astounding quickness he causes a variety of objects to disappear, finds lighted cigarettes in the pockets of bystanders, makes little plants spring up in a few seconds; it is amusing, all the more so because it is the last spectacle of the kind at which we shall be able to be present this year.

*24th June, Rahla-Rohtang.*

Kalil, on whom falls the responsibility for the discipline of the caravan, does his utmost to secure a speedy and orderly departure, in spite of the restlessness of the horses, who are still fresh and out of hand; some of them directly they are loaded, dash off at a wild gallop, scattering the baggage in every direction and at last coming to the ground themselves in a tangle of cords and bridles. The weather continues cloudy and damp; however, at intervals, when, under the assaults of the wind, the mass of clouds is rent asunder we catch glimpses of the snow-fields, the peaks and the passes which in a short time we ought to be crossing.

The road runs along the left bank of the Biās through the last of the forests which terminate almost suddenly under the Rohtang. From small level tracts is rising the smoke from encampments of nomadic Tibetans, with their blackish tents of thick woollen cloth or yak skin; these bear on the summit little sacred banners on which are inscribed prayers and formulas, the magic power of which will drive off evil spirits and influences, and protect the pilgrims from hidden dangers of the road and from weather. Numerous shepherds are proceeding upwards with their herds towards the summer pastures.

At midday we arrive at the foot of the first ascent; from Rahla everything slips back little by little to the

primitive; when mechanical agents are left behind and man finds himself close to a nature growing more and more majestic and boundless, even he regains a simplicity and a primitive outlook on life which in India the influence of the West is threatening with destruction. We breakfast under the veranda of the little bungalow of the Inspector of Roads—unfortunately the last—whilst the main body of the caravan begins the long climb by the tortuous “stairway”. Under a sun which has grown terribly hot, we also begin to climb the interminable chain of steps which leads to the pass. They are enormous steps, some cut in the living rock, some built up; a gigantic staircase which climbs upwards with tortuous windings and has stood the attacks of time and landslips. A colossal work which shows the antiquity of this road which links up India with Tibet and along which, for centuries, in the favourable season, there have passed with the usual cautious patience the same caravans carrying the same products. Change is slow in these lands.

The imposing character of the work has given rise to a legend: the staircase, they say, was made by Kesar, the famous hero of Tibetan epic whose exploits the bards recite throughout all Tibet, still exciting enthusiasm and passionate emotion in this population of shepherds and priests.

The panorama widens immeasurably; the valleys, the forests and the river grow smaller and smaller, almost vanish on the grey and misty horizon. On our left rises to a height of 4500 metres Biās Rikhi, whose almost unscalable pinnacles seem to stand on guard at the gates of the Himalayas. On the right other steep and ice-capped summits rise one behind the other towards the south-east as far as Hamtāh, which gives its name to the pass. The Biās, now almost a modest brook, disappears under

a great snow-field which masks its source. But towards August, when the snow has almost all melted, one sees it break forth at the very top of the pass from underneath a great rock: this is a sacred place, a *kuṇḍa*; and the Indians flock to it as pilgrims from as far distant as Kangra and deposit around it flowers and milk. A rude sculpture of high antiquity represents the famous prophet Vyāsa who, legend asserts, was the author of the greatest part of Indian epic.

Half-way we find the den of a sacred serpent, whom every traveller honours by pouring milk into a square hollow excavated in the rock. The serpent, greyish and of modest proportions, confines itself to the den in expectation of these offerings, without troubling about the people who come and go. This serpent cult, diffused still in many parts of India, was dominant in the religion of the Bon, which preceded Buddhism in Tibet and which, though it has yielded place to the latter officially, still survives in the rites, the legends, the ceremonies which accompany the whole of the life of the Tibetans; the serpents (*klu*), custodians of the fountains and the rivers, are a numerous class of the *sa bdag* (pronounced *sadāg*), the protectors of the soil, who must be propitiated if one does not wish to put one's own life at the mercy of their capricious judgment.

The highest peaks are still illuminated by the sun when we arrive at our third camp, on a platform in the shelter of the Biās Rikhi. After sunset the temperature falls rapidly, and a thick mist envelops us.

During the night the continuous rain causes the fall of avalanches of earth and snow which roll noisily towards the valley.

25th June, Koksar gñinpa.

At 4.30 a.m. we set out in the direction of the pass, whilst the drivers are still loading the horses. At 9 a.m. we are on the Rohtang; the snow is still very deep. A light wind from the north raises little whirls on the most recently fallen snow. It is cold. But we do not feel it; the sun is shining in a turquoise-blue sky and is reflected from the pinnacles and icy peaks which sparkle and glow and rise in succession till lost to sight in the distance. It is the first salute of the Himalayas; it is the invitation to their solitudes and their silences; and we are gripped by the ineffable fascination of this land in which the life of the spirit seems almost more intense and profound.

Ancient and extensive glaciers with their lofty and yellowish frontal moraines face the narrow valley of Koksar. We are at a height of 3900 metres, at the height of Monviso, and one could not say how lofty and majestic are the peaks which look down on us from every side. The valley of the Chandra, seen from the pass, is so narrow that it has the appearance of a cleft in the rock, long and deep. Towards the east, where the valley seems to be blocked by a cyclopean wall, is outlined in sparkling sheets of ice and a fantastic cluster of peaks the group of the Shigri (6550 metres). On the watershed, a number of dried branches stuck into a heap of stones are hung with strips of many-coloured cloth, the offerings of travellers to the divinities who guard the pass.

This heap of stones is called a *Lhato*; sometimes the basal portion is of masonry, forming a kind of little cabin in which the god dwells; white or red according to the sex of the deity; yak horns, filled with *chàng* (*c'an*) or Tibetan beer complete the offering, and the cry of



"*Lha so so lha rgyal lo*" is raised in salutation to the god when the summit of the pass has been crossed. Our caravan arrives towards 10 a.m. Norbu, the only Buddhist among our men, ties to the *Lhato* a strip of stuff which he tears from his greatcoat, reciting his prayers aloud meanwhile.

. The descent over the old frozen snow is long and arduous; towards midday we are at the bottom of the long narrow valley, and are making camp on a small grassy space. The sky is grey and it is beginning to rain again.

*26th June, Dorni.*

Towards nine o'clock the rain, which has fallen uninterruptedly all night, begins to slacken and so we decide to start.

We ourselves, together with some of our men, head the march in order to prepare the path; we displace the biggest boulders, fill up the deepest holes, mark out a track over the steepest snow-slopes as far as an extensive snow-bed where progress is less risky.

The very fine rain is continually setting in motion landslips and avalanches; the rock-walls, rendered friable by frost, disintegrate under the action of water and break away downhill. At 5 p.m., having found a level spot, we encamp; a grey cold camp. The drumming of the rain on our tents, and the dank and misty air which penetrates everywhere increase the sadness of the solitude.

*27th June, Chatni.*

We precede the caravan in order to prepare the way for the horses as usual.

After about a mile and a half of walking we encounter



ENCAMPMENT AT DORNI

*Facing p. 18*



THE CHANDRA



SNOW-BRIDGES IN THE VALLEY OF THE CHANDRA

a great fall, quite recent, of stones and masses of rock, which blocks the way completely. Hour after hour we toil laboriously, rolling away rocks, filling up holes, excavating in snow.

The work is dangerous, for the dislodging of a small stone may be enough to initiate the fall of the huge overhanging mass. It is necessary also to sound the beds of snow, for they are often eroded by water and might collapse under the weight of the caravan. At 2 p.m. the persistent rain and mist oblige us to make our sixth camp at the foot of a small snow-field.

*28th June, Chaksum.*

A serene morning; the valley displays itself to us in all its savage beauty. Towards the west there open out the narrow valleys which lead to the Hamtāh, the pass which we should have crossed if the porters of Jagatsukh had not refused to go on. Snow and ice on all sides. Frequent snow-bridges unite the banks of the Chandra which races down with turbid violence. Towards mid-day we find the path barred by a tributary stream which descends precipitously from an overhanging glacier. The caravan succeeds in fording it at a point where the water spreads out as a shallow little lake, whilst we try to find a crossing-place by going upwards towards the not far-distant source. Our ascent along the banks has its anxious moments, for the walls are perpendicular and all the rock extremely brittle; more than once we run the risk of being precipitated into the river; but now we have gone too high to think of turning back; we continue therefore to climb slowly, exercising the utmost vigilance. After two hours of this we at last find a snow-bridge, trusting ourselves to which we cross to the opposite bank. Even on this side the condition of the

ground is as bad as it can be; every now and then masses detached from above rush past close to us and with a thunderous roar fling themselves headlong into the foam-filled gorges. We have to struggle on for another hour before we reach the end of the treacherous ground; from there to the camp the distance is short. The day has been acutely trying, and for the first time we feel somewhat weary.

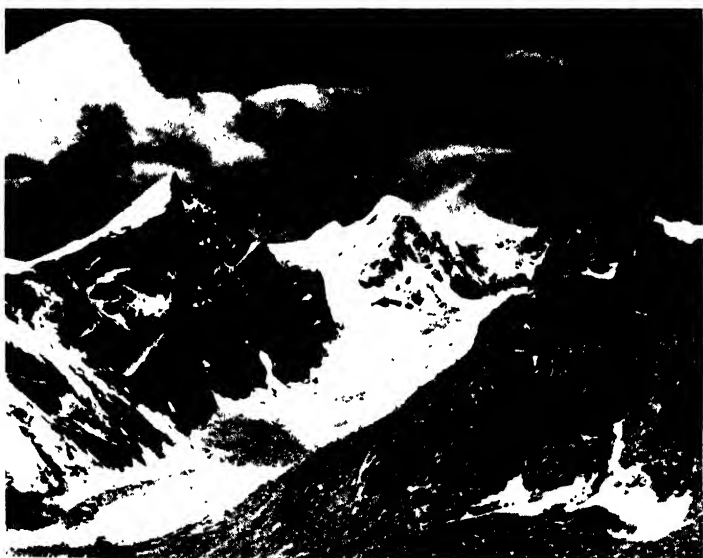
*29th June, Shigri.*

We leave camp again in rain; to-day also the ground is broken and irregular, the snow-crust is old and often splits into deep crevasses. Numerous avalanches and landslips disturb with their deep, distant boom the silence of the valley. We stop for a short time at Puti Runi. Towards evening we have to cross another river, the Bara Shigri, which rises in the neighbouring glacier. The caravan drivers would like to wait till next morning because the ford would then be shallower, and the water, as is natural in the early hours of the day, less turbulent. Only our example in advancing alone into the river induces the drivers to follow us with the horses into its violent and bitterly cold current. It is almost night; we find a clear space where we raise our tents for the eighth time.

Now the summit of Shigri is overhead. Always a wilderness; all our encampments are made on level ground which has a certain amount of protection from the danger of landslips and avalanches, the compulsory requirement for stopping-places for caravans from time immemorial. They have even a name; often a great rock mass offers also a natural protection against stormy weather; all around are traces of the bivouacs which have been there before us, mostly of Tibetans and Kangra



IN THE VALLEY OF THE CHIANDRA



THE SHIGRI GLACIER



PASSAGE OF THE SHIGRI



FIRST ENCOUNTERS IN THE VALLEY OF THE  
CHIANDRA

shepherds. In olden days this was the most frequented route between Spiti and India, at any rate before the glacier of Shigri, in falling, rendered the passage harder and more dangerous.

*30th June, Karchu.*

To-day we have to cross the great Shigri glacier which runs down from the mountain of that name to the banks of the Chandra.

About eighty years ago part of the glacier fell into the valley—a colossal catastrophe which must have been a repetition of the horrors of prehistoric cataclysms. The mass of ice precipitated has a thickness varying between forty and fifty metres, and is completely covered with a layer of broken rock, which fell on a subsequent occasion. From the lower part of the terminal moraine there issues a river which rises from the new glacier which is in course of formation above, and which, after having flowed through a huge tunnel in the more ancient glacier, flings its foaming and tumultuous body into the Chandra. On the ruins there exists not the slightest trace of a road, which is understandable, because the whole mass is in slow, continuous movement.

One of the best of the caravan men, leaving the camp early along with us, marks out with stones placed vertically the course which he considers best adapted for the passage of the horses. We are all deeply preoccupied; we are not certain yet if, after all this tremendous exertion, we shall succeed in overcoming the asperity of this land with our laden caravan, with men discouraged by hard marches, dispirited because of the bad weather, and all thoroughly chilled and suffering from the vileness of the season.

The surface of the ground is so convulsed that one



cannot understand how the poor beasts will manage to cross it.

By midday we have already traversed two-thirds of the glacier, but of the caravan there is no sign. Some Tibetans seated in a semi-circle are preparing their dinner—a little sheep's flesh pounded with blows of a stone; they are the first men we have met since we left Rahla. They gaze with the utmost astonishment on the two unknown men, who, without packs and dressed in European fashion, are crossing the most extensive glacier of the gloomy and desolate valley of the Chandra.

Directly Tucci greets them in Tibetan they are reassured and become most cordial. So we learn that they are coming from the valley of Manāli, whither they had gone to get supplies of timber, and that now they are on their way, like ourselves, to Losar in the valley of Spiti. Each one of them carries three or four planks bound together, and secured on his shoulders by cords of wool.

This is our first evidence of the very hard life which the Tibetans endure; the absolute dearth of trees obliges the inhabitants of Spiti to replenish their stocks of wood in the distant forests of Manāli or the Hamtāh. With this load they are now returning from the Rohtang, and to-morrow they will climb to 4500 metres to cross the Kamzam-la.

We make a halt beside them, and whilst waiting for the caravan, we eat our modest meal of meat and preserved anchovies. Towards 1 p.m. the caravan enters on the difficult march across the glacier and its crumbling boundaries; it takes about three hours; we are even obliged to have recourse to the help of the Tibetans whom we have met. These have been three anxious hours. In late afternoon we resume the road in the bed



THE KAMZAM LA AND ITS STELES



YAK AT LOSAR



LOSAR

of the river which from the top of the landslip becomes very wide.

Late in the evening we arrive at the river Chota Shigri, where we make our camp at an elevation of 4000 metres. For the first time we feel certain that we shall reach Spiti.

1st July, Losar.

The day begins badly; one of our caravan men, who has already crossed several times by this route, advises us to cross the Chota Shigri by the snow-bridge which is to be found, so he says, some hundreds of metres higher up. By doing so we shall avoid being soaked with icy water from the morning onwards. Unfortunately these drivers have the vaguest ideas about distance; and so, to avoid a small stream, we have to tramp about three miles over the snow to return afterwards on the opposite bank to the camp, and that on this particular day when we will have to march farther than usual. We begin the ascent towards the pass of Kamzam (about 4500 metres); every moment we imagine we have arrived at the top, but unfortunately it is only a matter of a change of horizon. To ask our man where the pass is would be ridiculous, seeing that for about three hours, according to him, we have always been within a hundred metres of the summit.

At midday we at last see the *Lhato* with its strips of cloth fluttering in the wind; the ascent is finished but the descent does not yet begin. A wide plateau having but a gentle slope opens out on the pass. It is all covered with slabs of stone of various dimensions, set upright; many have been broken up badly by ice. Tracts like this are not infrequent in Tibet; Roerich's expedition<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. N. Roerich, *The Animal Style among the Nomad Tribes of Northern Tibet* (Skythika, 3), pp. 11, 15.

has also noted and studied them. The fact that they are to be found on the passes seems to indicate that they are not always gravestones; instead of that they are probably prototypes of the *Lhato* and the cairns of stones which at the present time are piled up near the *Lhato* when a pass has been crossed; in fact they must be ritual monuments rather than commemorative slabs of stone.

The landscape changes suddenly; behind us, in the direction of the valley of the Chandra which we crossed with such painful effort, the gleaming white peaks and the huge glaciers projecting vertically over the river; towards the east the reddish mountains of Spiti, bare of snow. Towards 2 p.m. we begin the descent along the valley of the River Lichu. In front of us rises a greyish-yellow mountain, which, through the erosion of centuries has acquired the aspect of a ruined castle: pinnacles, towers and caves which the sun hides in mysterious shadows. The vision of a dream. Along the side of the road, engraved on great rock-faces, are prehistoric figures of the ibex and of men, of the same type as those which are found in Ladakh and which have been studied by Francke. Our driver announces that we are only two miles from the village of Losar. It is almost night; we have traversed at least four miles and of the village not even a shadow. "On the other side of that ridge lies Losar," our guide assures us; but on the other side of that ridge, behold another, and then still another, and a small river and a torrent, and another ridge. After one last offshoot of the hills, steep and arduous, we see, more than two miles away, a white cottage on the bank of the river; "that is a house opposite to Losar," says our man for the last time. Now we are really nearly there; already we are meeting yak, the woolly Tibetan cattle, which are returning slowly from the pastures or

from work. We reach the tents when Venus is already shining in the heavens.

*2nd July.*

The River Spiti, which takes its rise higher up, has here at Losar<sup>1</sup> an extraordinarily wide bed. The village, consisting of twenty-one small houses, and the temple, are built on the right bank, in the lee of the mountain; the houses bear a strange resemblance to small colonial forts, rectangular or square, with slightly sloping walls; they usually consist of two stories, only the upper of which possesses a few very small windows badly aligned and a verandah in the centre which puts in communication with the private chapel the various rooms of the house; the flat roof is covered with a thick thatch of brushwood and dried grass. On the ground floor are located the stables, which in the winter-time serve almost as heating chambers and store up heat for the rooms overhead.<sup>2</sup> The plan of these houses of Spiti is repeated almost always with unvarying uniformity, according to the plan reproduced<sup>3</sup> in fig. 1. On every roof there flutter gaily, attached to long poles, banners bearing the usual *dhâraṇî*, or sacred formulas, almost always in Sanskrit, by so much the more efficacious in their action the less their meaning is known.

From an early hour in the morning the whole village is collected round our tents; and we quickly strike up a friendship with the leading men of the place—the priests and the doctor. To become friendly with the priests and gain their sympathy means that we see opened to us the doors of temples and houses; when the priests are well disposed towards the stranger, the

<sup>1</sup> According to inscriptions the form of the name should be *bLo sar*.

<sup>2</sup> The ground floor is called *cyog k'añ*, "the service rooms".

<sup>3</sup> This represents the plan of the upper floor.

laity also will no longer have scruples about showing him their religious objects. These Tibetan people, who are dominated by Lamaism, live under the spiritual rule of the Lamas (*bLama*). Really in applying this term to them we are abusing it, for the true Lama is like the Indian *guru*; either he is a person who has acquired

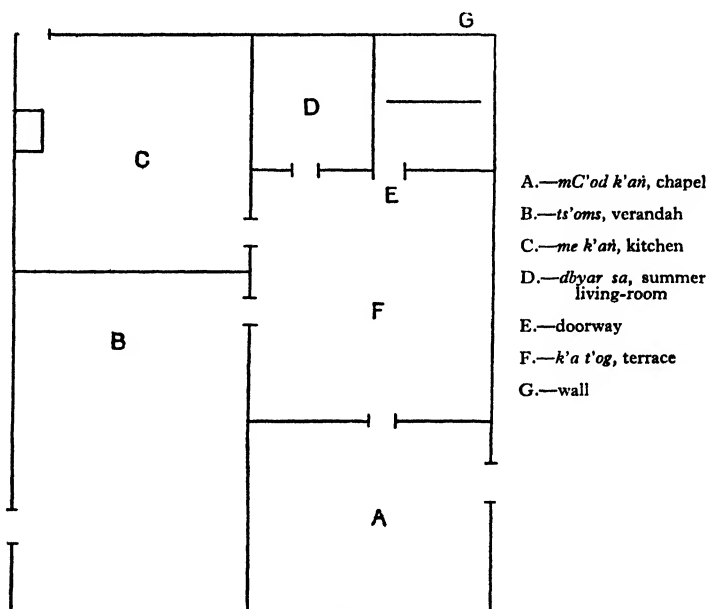


Fig. 1

extraordinary power for which he is transmuted into a *siddha puruṣa*, that is to say into a perfect man, or he is one who has initiated the disciple into a mystical religious truth and as such has the right, in his relationship with that individual, to the title of spiritual preceptor. On the other hand, most of the Tibetan monks ought to be styled simply priests (*grva pa*, pronounced *trapà*). The doctor, then, with rare exceptions, is one of the most learned and skilled men in the village; he has travelled



TEMPLE AT LOSAR

*Facing p 26*





DANCES OF MONKS AT LOSAR



MONKS AT LOSAR

a great deal and can read and write often much better than the monks who, in this province of Western Tibet, do not seem to possess either the intellectual standard or the mystical perfection reached without a doubt by their predecessors when these temples were reared which were once centres of light and spiritual culture throughout a great part of Tibet.

In the afternoon we go and visit some private chapels (*mc'od k'an*). They are all very much alike; the only variation is in the quantity and the value of the objects, depending on the prosperity of the families. The little chapel is always made in the best room in the house, on the terrace; a tiny window permits the entrance of as much light as is necessary to distinguish things with difficulty. One wall, usually on the right, is occupied by the library, in which are packed together the sacred books, jealously wrapped up in cloth and compressed between two boards.

Tucci examines minutely all the volumes in the small private libraries; some are printed, some in manuscript. Amongst well-known texts of Lamaism he finds notable material which interests him greatly; for example, the epic of *Kesar* from *gLin*, the legendary epic hero of Tibet, in an ancient xylograph, the first which has been found of this famous epic cycle,<sup>1</sup> and different mystic treatises; he is also interested in the *rnam t'ar*, or biographies of Tibetan saints, which often contain precious information of an historical and geographical character. But all these supremely important works have to be sought for assiduously, by examining one by one the great dusty volumes which constitute the libraries,

<sup>1</sup> David—Neel also asserts that the epic of *Kesar* circulates only in manuscript or orally; the text found contains only the chants, the arrangement of which was probably left to the discretion of the bards. *Guésar de Ling*, p. xvi, n. 1.

more or less rich, of these small churches. For the most part, they contain the usual liturgical manuals which serve as guides for religious services and rites connected with votive offerings or exorcism, or they are the most famous treatises of Buddhist doctrine and mysticism; such for example is the "great mother" (*yum c'en mo*), that is to say the *Prajñāpāramitā*, which in various editions more or less extensive, from that consisting of a few lines to that of 100,000 lines, embodies the quintessence of the teaching of the Buddhism of "the Great Career". These texts are very difficult, and probably there is not in all Spiti a single monk who can explain the profound significance of them or who knows anything of the immense exegetic literature which Indians and Tibetans have devoted to its most obscure conceptions, to clarifying them, furnishing them with glossaries, and classifying them.

They read them, however, in the ceremonies, convinced that from the sacred book, which preserves the sublime revelation of the Buddha, there issues miraculous power capable of affording salvation from every danger and of giving peace and blessing to the souls of the dead. Often, in times of strife and misfortune, or merely to procure for themselves a certain religious benefit, the monks are invited, in return for a recompense far from despicable considering the scanty resources of the country, to recite them aloud, and read them mechanically without in the slightest degree understanding them or making others understand their content.

After the library the altar; a little table on which are arranged dishes of copper or silver, usually in an odd number and filled with the most limpid water, some butter-lamps, plates holding offerings of rice and barley, and the *bumpa* or vase for consecrated water. Then the

chief divinity in the centre surrounded by the lesser gods. All the other walls are covered with banners or *thañka*, the well-known pictures on cloth, very often of great value, not only iconographic but artistic. In one corner, the big drum on its great wooden pedestal and the cymbals for the daily religious ceremony.

In one of the private chapels we find a precious picture, for which we offer the owner 160 silver rupees; but he refuses them, for his father on his death-bed had impressed upon him that the prosperity of the family and the fields was bound up with this sacred work of art. No argument and no bribe can shake him in his obstinate refusal.

*3rd July.*

In the morning we climb up to the village temple, where the Lamas have prepared a religious function, in which we also take part.

The temple (*lha k'an*) is modest and rather new, as everything else seems to be modern in this village. It belongs to the yellow sect, the only one which is represented in northern Spiti as far as Kaze.

In the afternoon community dances and songs; the women, very ugly, willingly allow themselves to be cinematographed and photographed. At sunset all the priests in the village present themselves in the camp in their ceremonial garb, with the yellow pointed caps distinctive of the sect; to the sound of cymbals, bells and drums they begin their symbolic dances.

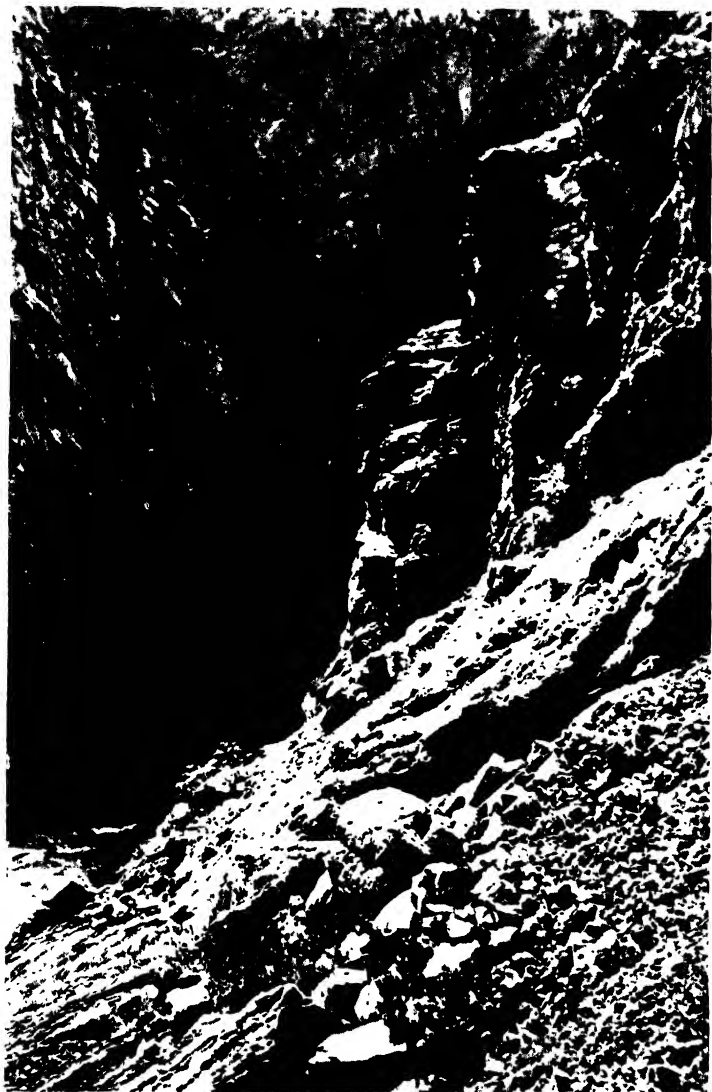
The cinematograph machine intrigues them greatly; the ceremony finished, they all crowd round it; some of the more daring look into the objective, in the hope of being able to see something and to discover a secret. We have to dine surrounded by the whole village, who

are infinitely diverted at seeing us eat with knife, fork and plates. The empty tins of the Cirio conserve cause violent disputes amongst the people who struggle to possess them.

In the depth of the night, mysteriously, like conspirators, priests and laymen who in the daytime had shown unshaken incorruptibility, come furtively to the tent to offer to us sacred books and cult objects. Only dread of public opinion keeps them honest during the daytime. Even the doctor, enveloped in an enormous cloak which renders him absolutely unrecognizable, arrives at the tents carrying the medicine books which he had found at home; his only fear is lest the populace should happen to recognize him. The owner of the banner is the only person who does not show himself; probably the fear of paternal vengeance holds him back from carrying out a sacrilegious sale.

*4th July, Kioto.*

Before the tents are taken down, the priests come to the camp to offer to "the Precious One of the Lamas" (*bla ma rin po c'e*), as they call Tucci, the consecrated seeds, and to receive from him a benediction, which he bestows on them with suitable solemnity, placing his hand on their heads as they kneel before him. And the blessing is followed, naturally, by the *sorè* (*gsol ras*), as *baksheesh* is rendered in Tibetan. At 9 a.m. we are fording the River Spiti, with the help of the monks who, their red tunics discarded, plunge naked into the bitterly cold water to guide our horses towards the least dangerous parts of the ford. Twelve miles of good road with a stop at Hansi and here we are at Kioto, a little island of verdure amongst so much squalor. Few houses; signs of great poverty. There is not even a *lha k'an*, and



IN THE VALLEY OF THE PARILUNGBI

*Facing p. 30*



IN THE VALLEY OF THE PARILUNGBI



DIFFICULT PASSES LEADING TO KIBAR

only two families have a private chapel with the most humble religious equipment.<sup>1</sup>

5th July, Kibar.

Early in the morning we set out for Kibar. The road is sandy but easy up to the pass which the local people call *Lha t'añ rtse* (and not *Lhanartsa* as Francke refers to it); its name would be derived from a temple which in ancient days stood on the grassy plain which stretches round the gap. Herds of horses are feeding with leisurely satisfaction on this green carpet which snow-fields higher up nourish and make fruitful. We too enjoy the soft moist grass, and interrupt the march for a short time to rest the animals and to partake of our lunch. Then the road becomes exceedingly difficult; we have to descend into a deep rocky abyss hollowed out through the erosion of centuries by the action of the Parilungbi.

A gorge-like valley runs steeply down to the river; the narrow path scales gigantic rocks and descends by cyclopean steps. The animals run continual risks of rolling down into the gulf. The drivers urge them on with cries and assist their progress by two of them dragging at the bridle and other two holding on by the tail. Then painfully up to Kibar by an ascent which seems as if it will never end.

Before beginning this last, rather rough part of our march, we stop for a short time at *Tumlé* (*dum las*). This consists of a hut and, higher up, some nomads' tents. In this hut dwells a Bonpo sorcerer, that is, one of the superstitious followers of the indigenous religion of Tibet, the doctrinal systematization of which

<sup>1</sup> In that most useful book, *Routes in the Western Hindālaya, Kashmir, &c.*, by Colonel Mason, p. 200, Kioto is not recorded as an intermediate march between Kibar and Losar.



is attributed to Scenrāb (*Gžen rab*), a man of *Žaṅ Žuṅ*, according to the legend that is to say of Guge, the province of Western Tibet which we have to cross. This place is called *Bonzetən* (*bon Ts'e stan*).

Unfortunately the magician is absent and it is with reluctance that his wife opens to us the door of the cottage and assures us that her husband possesses neither books nor statues. We do not believe her, but it is useless to think we can overcome the incorruptible superstition of Tibetan old women. Besides, according to one of our informants from Hansi, other families traditionally "Bonpo" exist in Spiti; their houses are known by special names, as are the temples: *bon sku ag* at Kyahar, *bon rnam gliṅ* at Chikim.

At 4 p.m. we enter Kibar where we make the twelfth camp at 4020 metres.

We visit the temples of Kibar;<sup>1</sup> all are of modest proportions, and of slight interest because they are recent.

Probably the country was devastated by Zoravar during his Tibetan expedition. The only really ancient temple has been destroyed; it is situated north-west of the village on a great plain at the extreme limit of the cultivated fields; it is called by the people the *Lha k'an sgaṅ*<sup>2</sup> and the ruins which remain show a plan exactly like that of the most ancient little chapels in the region, coeval with *Rin c'en bzaṅ po* and the first dynasty of Guge (v. fig. 2). The other two small churches are in the high part of the village, close to each other, and are called: *Kanghiür Lakàn* and *Lakàn gongma* (*bka' ägyur lha k'an* and *lha K'an goṅ ma*).

<sup>1</sup> In inscriptions the usual form is *kyi bar*.

<sup>2</sup> Probably that which Francke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, I, p. 46, says went by the name of *Lha bla mai dgon pa*; but of this name, as far as my research has extended, there is not a trace.

The first owes its name to a copy of the *Kanghiür* (edition of *Snar t'an*) which has been deposited in it recently.<sup>1</sup>

More interesting, however, is a private chapel which we find in the house of a prominent family in the

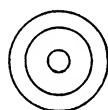
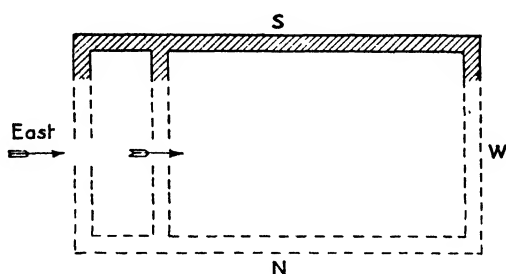


Fig. 2

village; it is called *Gianciublün* (*Byan c'ub glün*) and contains wall pictures probably of the seventeenth century. Very well executed is the figure of Pratisarā (*so sor abrañ ma*) surrounded by other deities like Tārā

<sup>1</sup> The *Kanghiür* (*bka' agyur*) is a great collection which contains the revelation of the Buddha and his words.

Avalokiteśvara and many celebrated masters of Lamaism. Meanwhile it happens that there is present here the *Chansòd*<sup>1</sup> or administrator of the convent of Ki, which we have to visit in our next stage; he is the brother of the village doctor and custodian of the temple of Kibar. A personality. In the absence of the abbot he manages the property and exercises discipline in the richest and most extensive monastery in all Spiti. He has been to Lhasa; he understands more about profane than sacred things, and, like every *Chansòd*, tries also to do some business with us. But we make him understand that our generosity will depend on the reception accorded to us in the monastery.

We visit the village of Chikim<sup>2</sup> on the opposite bank of the river. From our camp we see its houses and fields, but to reach it the road is very long and we have to pass again through the gloomy valley of the Parilungbi. As usual, we enter all the richest houses in the village to see, photograph and acquire books and iconographic material. The doctor's house is a perfect storehouse of objects and pictures of value, but he is so orthodox that we get only very few things. In another private chapel we find a magnificent book-cover, in wrought wood, on which, in the middle of floral motives, there are reproduced the five Buddhas of the supreme pentad.

In the afternoon we return to Kibar by way of that accursed road, which is one of the most atrocious we have ever seen.

Directly we arrive we send for the village doctor and get him to bring us the collection of medicinal herbs which he generally uses.

Those familiar with Tibetan studies know how

<sup>1</sup> *p'yag mdsod*. Our *Chansòd* is called *Tascipunzóg*.

<sup>2</sup> In inscriptions it is written *spyi k'yim*.



FRESCOES IN BYAN C'UB GLIN AT KIBAR



KIBAR



CHIKIM

difficult it is to identify the various plants which are mentioned in medical books. Very often the lexicons get out of the difficulty with the generic expression "name of a herb". It is necessary to gather together a complete medical herbarium from the regions traversed, noting time after time the local name of the plant, either to verify the information supplied to us or because very often the same herb is known in different districts by different names. We shall entrust the botanical identification to some competent person directly we return to Europe.

And then we make every effort to collect medical works; the medical literature of Tibet is derived for the most part from India, in less degree from China, but it has received a local elaboration which it is necessary to investigate.

The study of this oriental medicine is not merely a matter of scientific curiosity; we find in it the experience of centuries of people who undoubtedly are endowed with a keen spirit of observation and who have succeeded in discovering the medicinal virtues of many plants in which the country is very rich. It is not to be excluded *a priori* that even our science may benefit from a calm and profound investigation of drugs, the efficacy and the nature of which are for the most part still a mystery to us.

We attach a Lama to the caravan that we may have his help in the search for books, and also to make our entry into monasteries easier. Our Lama is an authority; in fact he belongs to the monastery of Kaze, and is the priest set apart for the education and spiritual care of the *Nono* of Spiti, as they call the "kinglet" of this district.

It is a feast-day, the day previous to that of full-

moon. The modest head of the temple, that is to say in fact the doctor-sorcerer who is the custodian of it, offers a sumptuous banquet to all the people of the village; women, men, old people and babies. Really it is the people who invite themselves, since what is now offered to them is only a tiny part of the traditional tithes paid to the temple and its holy representatives.

The banquet will be preceded by a ceremony of exorcism in which the protecting deities of Buddhist law, the so-called *C'os skyon*,<sup>1</sup> must descend into the body of the sorcerer, and animating him, fight through the medium of his person a tremendous battle with the spirits, the demons, the furies who menace the life of man, the prosperity of flocks and the fertility of the soil. At 4 p.m., from the top of the terrace of the *gompà* the priests begin to call the faithful to the reunion, sending out their invitation with sound of voice and of trumpet. The women make their way towards the temple, all in festive attire, wearing ornaments of silver and turquoise; their very fine, black tresses fall in carefully arranged fashion down their backs, kept in place by strands of silver and pins adorned with turquoises and coral.

We also, provided with cinematographic and photographic cameras, make our way towards the interesting religious ceremony.

On the wide terrace the women are sitting on the ground spinning whilst waiting for the function to commence; the men are helping the priests with the preparations for the feast. The younger priests, seated in the centre, are invoking the divinities with loud-voiced prayers, accompanied by the hollow sound of trumpets of copper and marine shells. The richest wear the silken robes which they must assume for the dances. The ceremony

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce: *choklon*.



THE DOCTOR-SORCERER



THE DANCE OF THE DOCTOR-SORCERER





THE MONASTERY OF KI



AN ITINERANT LAMA

begins with the distribution of tea or *sampà*, barley flour mixed with water.

Meanwhile, from the interior of the temple there floats out to our ears a confusion of sounds mingled with the chants of the priests and the doctor-sorcerer, the Lama who is waiting to become possessed of the god and is preparing himself to conquer, under his ægis, the spirits of evil. Suddenly this singular creature, whom the gods have chosen as the instrument of their will, issues from the temple garbed in splendid sacerdotal vestments. In one hand he grasps a tremendously heavy sword, in the other a bottle of barley wine, which he drinks in little mouthfuls, perhaps to give himself courage in the fateful ordeal; music and the frenzied roll of drums urge him on to the great conflict. Little by little his excitement increases; his dance becomes more and more violent and confused; his whole body shakes with tremors and shudders; the sword begins to sweep round and round in the air, and, to judge by the violence of the duel, there are thousands of spirits who are assaulting him, and whom he, with the aid of the god, transfixes one by one.

When all the demons have been killed, the divine combatant throws some grains of barley over the shouting crowd, and then swoons in the arms of his assistants, who carry him inside the temple.

The servants of the *gompà*<sup>1</sup> now distribute barley-wine to all the faithful, who, as the result of their repeated libations begin to sing in chorus. Until a very late hour the drunken crowd continue to sing and play in honour of the gods. And not all that follows is conspicuously sacred in its character. We return to the camp and

<sup>1</sup> *Gompà* (*dgon pa*) is the Tibetan name for a monastery, whatever its size may be.

resume our interminable and wearisome discussions with the furtive vendors of books and sacred objects.

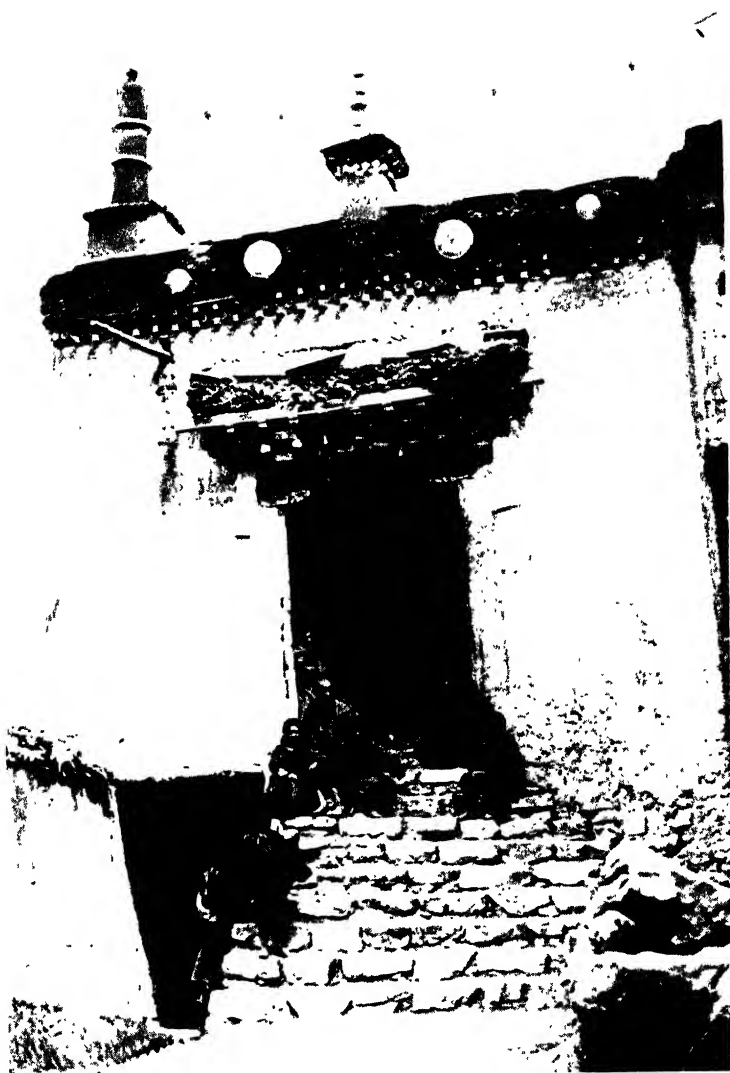
8th July, Ki.

We set out for Ki,<sup>1</sup> where we have been invited to visit the famous monastery; the invitation has been given to us by the *Chansòd*, with whom we have established friendship during the preceding days. The true head or *skushok* of the monastery is at present ten years old and is studying at Tashilumpo, where he will remain till he is eighteen, when he will be formally inducted into his *gompà*.

He is a *tulkù* (*sprul sku*) that is to say not really a living Buddha, as is often written, but an incarnation; the incarnation of a *bodhisattva*, who, having attained the highest perfection has become potentially a Buddha; he renounces the blessedness of Nirvāna and makes a vow to remain in this world in order to promote by example and teaching the salvation of as great a number as possible of its creatures. His vital essence thus passes from body to body—because the body, like every material aggregate, is destined to dissolve—but it remains immaculate in its acquired, unalterable purity and holiness. The incarnate one of the monastery of Ki is the great translator *Rin c'en bzang po* who lived about A.D. 1000, who, by his labours and by his translations into Tibetan of the Sanskrit texts, has diffused the religion of the Buddha amongst people till then almost savage, who lived in these wild valleys, and, as has been shown in the biography of him which one of us has written<sup>2</sup> has sub-

<sup>1</sup> In the inscriptions: *skyid*. The monastery has nothing in common with that of *Ke*, which, according to some historical works quoted by Francke, p. 46, was built by *aBrom ston* in the neighbourhood of *Mañyul*. *Mañyul* (v. *Indo-Tibetica*, II, p. 15) is close to Nepal.

<sup>2</sup> Tucci, *Indo-Tibetica*, II, *Rin c'en bzang po* and the renaissance of Buddhism in Western Tibet about A.D. 1000.



KI. INTERIOR OF THE MONASTERY

*Facing p. 38*



DANCES



KI. SACRED DANCES

stituted for the Bonpo cults the Buddhist faith in its noblest forms and in its profoundly mystical manifestations. He is usually re-incarnated either in Spiti or in Western Tibet; in his present existence he assumed the human form in the neighbourhood of Sumra, a hamlet on the extreme border of northern Bashahr near Spiti. After Ki the most important monastery in which he usually resides is that of Kanam in Kunāvar, famous also in the West, because it was there that there laboured for many years the pioneer of Tibetan studies, Csoma de Kőrös.

9th July.

The monastery is built in the form of a little citadel on the summit of a perfectly conical, extremely steep hill; a long, winding path climbs upwards to the gate of the enclosure. Close to the entrance, an itinerant Lama who precedes us is prostrating himself and kissing the ground every now and again;<sup>1</sup> when he finds out that we are cinematographing him he makes signs of protest, but by that time the sacrilege is accomplished. A rupee calms his indignation.

We enter the monastery and are received by the *Chansòd*, who by winding passages and dark stairways conducts us to the very top of the *gompà*, where he offers us tea prepared in our honour. We sit down with crossed legs before the low table, whilst our host winds round our necks, as a mark of honour, the traditional scarf of gauze. In Tibet the order of precedence is always respected most scrupulously; in fact the tea is served to Tucci in a cup of jade and silver, to Gheri in one of silver, and to the *Chansòd* in one of wood ornamented with silver. The same decreasing proportion is observed in the height of our seats. Gheri had

<sup>1</sup> This votive performance is called *brkyan p'yag* (pron. *Kianchd*).

already heard about Tibetan tea, composed of a horrible mixture of green tea, goat-butter, soda and mineral salt, but now he has the chance of actually sampling it. The experience is far from delightful; to have to swallow such a mixture, thick and greasy as soup of the vilest quality and mostly terribly salt, is for him an inexpressible ordeal.

All the young priests are standing round us and watching us with much curiosity; only the oldest remember the visit made to the monastery by Francke in 1909. In the courtyard of the principal church the *Chansòd* has prepared a religious dance, in which all the priests of the monastery take part. The numerous musical instruments include cymbals, drums, small bells, very long copper trumpets (*duñ rin*), clarionets of silver (*rkañ gliñ*), and sea-shells (*duñ dkar*); the players are lined up on a low wall waiting for the dancers. By way of a small passage there enter with dancing steps, preceded by two cymbal players, the chief priests. They are clad in rich mandarin robes of silk and wear monstrous masks of papier mâché, of enormous dimensions and diabolical in their grins. Two by two, always dancing, others arrive, all wearing different masks; some wear monumental hats garnished with skulls and coloured ribbons; some hide their faces in monstrous heads of fantastic animals. All are grasping arms of every size and shape which are to be used in the conflict with the evil spirits. In these dances everything is symbolic; in part they commemorate the slaughter of the apostate king *gLai dar ma*, who in the ninth century had tried to reinstate the Bon religion and had persecuted Buddhism; but for the most part they correspond to a rite essential in all *Tantra* ceremonies, called in Sanskrit *āveśa*, during which the *sādhaka*, as the person is called who performs

the ceremonies, is possessed by terrific divinities (*k'ro bo*) and by their instrumentality effects purification, or the elimination of all the adverse forces which oppose the triumph of religious law. On our return to the camp, when the small population of the village has retired and darkness covers everything, we see arrive at the tents the *Chansòd* in person, who in the same dignified style in which he received us to-day offers us now some of the sacred objects from his collection.

10th July, Kaze.

A short march to Kaze.<sup>1</sup> On our left a path leads to Langja where, according to some information received at Kibar, there ought to be a Bonpo temple. The search made by Norbu, an intelligent and capable man, who in the evening returns wearily from his investigation, is negative in its result. We are in a territory belonging to other sects; to the *dGe lugs pa* (pron. *Ghelupà*), that is to say the yellow sect or reformed party founded by *Tsoni K'a pa*—the only one which we have met with hitherto—succeed in this zone of Kaze the *Sa skya pa* (pron. *Sakiapà*) so called from *Saskya Pañ c'en*, who was the first to receive the investiture of Tibet from the Mongolian dynasty, and who carried out a first reform in the heart of Lamaism. The history of the sect in Western Tibet, according to some texts found by Tucci, seems to go back to the fourteenth century.

The monastery, once constructed, by the liberality of a prince or by the joint efforts of a community, diffuses its influence throughout the whole region and attracts

<sup>1</sup> In the inscriptions the usual form is: *k'ar* (= *mk'ar*) *rtse*. According to some of these inscriptions there was at Kaze a palace (*p'o bran*) of the kings of Ladakh, when Spiti passed under the rule of that dynasty, and the restorer of the *gompà* was *Ni ma rnam rgyal* (seventeenth century), the king whom P. Desideri met when he passed through Ladakh on his way to Lhasa in 1715.



to itself the laity of the villages which live under its spiritual protection. Whilst remaining within the grand orbit of Lamaism, every sect follows its own particular style of mystic performances or of ritualism and bestows its preference on this or that deity, on this or that master, according to its fancy; but there exists not a shadow of intolerance or of animosity amongst the various schools, except perhaps against the *rNin ma pa* (pron. *Gninmapà*), "the ancient ones", because they have accepted and held in favour the beliefs left by the Bonpo. But *Pad-masambhava* is venerated and receives homage from every sect; and the people take no part in the antipathy of the monks for rival leaders, but always show the same pious respect for all temples, all gods, and all priests, because they know how to live in a world in which there are moving, acting and interacting thousands of forces, with which, if disaster is to be avoided, it is necessary to keep oneself on good terms.

In this village is the monastery of our Lama; here we feel somewhat as if we are at home. Under a burning hot sun, we begin the ascent leading to the monastery, which we glimpse through a cleft in the mountain, high above, on the living rock, perched there like a falcon's nest. We mount slowly along this road, if such it can be called, stony and incredibly steep; one cannot take a single step without slipping and causing a fall of stones. At midday, very tired, perhaps more because of the heat than the exertion, we halt at about a hundred metres below the pass (4100 metres) to have lunch.

Even our Lama has reached the limit of his strength; we offer him a piece of cheese and if we did not check him in time he would eat along with it all the tinfoil. A little because of the heat, a little because of the unaccustomed food, a little because of weariness, he



THE MONASTERY OF KAZE



KAZE. DANCES IN THE MONASTERY



OUR LAMA OF KAZE



LITHANG. AN ASCETIC OF THE SECT OF THE  
"PERFECT ONES"

has an attack of stomach trouble, and cures himself by eating a kind of friable stone resembling lime which he searches for amongst the rocks bordering the track. Having left the pass behind, we also follow his advice and nibble the stalks of the wood-thistle, after having carefully removed the rind and the spiny leaves. Their rather bitter, very pleasant taste serves to allay our thirst, which is intense.

But the monastery is still far distant; after the pass comes an immense grassy plain at the height of more than 4000 metres. Beyond that, on the extreme horizon, gigantic mountains. One understands why the monastery of Kaze is called "the outpost of the sect", and we understand also why Francke says that he had no time to climb to the monastery during his brief stay in Kaze.

The monastery is surrounded by lofty walls built on the verge of tremendous precipices. The massive walls, painted in stripes of white, red and black, and having a considerable slant, give to the *gompà* the appearance of a strong mediæval fortress. The hollow, solemn sound of copper trumpets sounded by the monks in honour of the Lama of the West, re-echoes from valley to valley. The whole chapter of the convent comes along the road to meet us, whilst under the walls other priests blow magnificent silver trumpets. Tired and breathless as we are, we have to adapt ourselves to the custom of every devout pilgrim and make the ritual circuit of an interminable little wall covered with stones, on which is cut the sacred formula of *Avalokiteśvara*. We are able to examine one by one and to photograph the votive inscriptions, almost all of the time of the king of Ladakh *Ñi ma rnam rgyal*; they are important because they preserve the name of certain Gagas, as they call

the Nonos of Spiti, and they show that their family is derived from ancient rulers who administered the district in the name of the Ladakh kings.<sup>1</sup>

Escorted by the rejoicing chapter, we wend our way through narrow passages and deserted courtyards to the *Lha k'an* which is at the highest point of the monastery; in its austere shade, seated on long cushions where the monks squat during religious services, we imbibe horrible tea, the worst we have ever had. We study the few pictures and explore the poor library, but even there we succeed in finding something interesting which the authority of our Lama gets us permission to carry away. And then follow the usual dances, which close with our generous contribution to the convent and its few inhabitants. In the evening down the steep descent to the camp.

12th July, Lithang.

An easy march from Kaze to Lithang where we make the fifteenth camp. At Lithang, a new sphere of religious influence. It is no longer the *Sa skya pa* who are in the ascendant, but the *rNin ma pa*, "the ancient ones", and more particularly a sub-sect, that of the *rDsogs c'en*, "the perfect ones".

They come mostly from the valley of the Pin. Tall and sturdy, they have beards and long hair knotted on the head in accordance with ascetic custom; they are said to be highly proficient in magic practices and the people hold them in pious respect. They belong to the *gonchèn* (*sGom c'en*), the people devoted to meditation and the extremely severe exercises of the Yoga, which engender exceptional powers, regarded as the sign and seal of the holy life which is led. One of them, with whom we have

<sup>1</sup> One of these Gagas is called commander of the fort (*mk'ar dpon*).

had a long conversation, shows the same disdain for books and dogmatism as is characteristic of such travelling Lamas as the Sādhū or the Indian *bāhul*. Religion is not knowledge but experience, raised to higher spiritual planes, and the enduring possession of eternal truth, which no theology will be able to reveal to us, but the doors leading to which only an internal and directly personal vision can open to us.

These people are the opposite of ourselves; for them the world, together with the relationships and the contacts and the limitations which are derived from it, is a magical illusion; it hides that immaculate brilliancy of cosmic knowledge, on which there rest, unstable, the waves of phenomenal appearances, to which alone in our ignorance we assign consistency and value.

Certainly not all the devout men of Tibet have succeeded in attaining this purity and perfection; but anyone who has the opportunity of talking with them and who meets them in a sympathetic spirit will often recognize intuitively, masked by the harsh lineaments and the uncouth figure, profound spiritual blessedness.

13th July, Lhalung.

On leaving Lithang the caravan divides into two columns; we ourselves, together with the tents, the photographic and cinematographic apparatus, the kitchen and two men, take the way to Lhalung in the valley of the Lingti, whilst the main body of the caravan, under the command of Abdūl, sets out for the capital, Drangkhar. We arrive at Lhalung in the afternoon, after a wearisome journey under a burning sun.

The road seems as if it will never end. We re-enter the territory of the yellow sect. The same evening we visit the *Gompā* of the *Lotsāva*, and photograph all the details

worth studying there. The little temple is not unknown, for it has already been visited by Shuttleworth, who referred to it in a monograph.<sup>1</sup> But, in identifying the various images of the deities, he must have trusted to the information given by the local Lamas who, unfortunately, have now lost completely the faculty to understand these plastic symbols of mystic knowledge unknown to them, and who, rather than discredit themselves in the eyes of a foreigner, have given entirely casual explanations: a male statue on the right (*Vairocana*), identified as a female deity (*Vijayā*); a female divinity on the left taken for *Avalokiteśvara*, and so on.

When one cannot find a cultured Lama—and perhaps, in Western Tibet, cultured Lamas have become extremely rare—it is necessary in proceeding to the identification of the pictorial and plastic cycles which adorn the temples and chapels to adopt as authority the literary sources and the liturgical works which, describing the rite, almost always contain the formula of meditation of the gods and their disposition in the mystic “diagram” which symbolically represents them. It is the first temple we have met with which goes back to the times of the great *Rin c'en bzah po*; it is in an excellent state of preservation; the stucco statues are intact, but some priest with wretched taste has had the idea of renovating them in bright colours, to the detriment of their original beauty.

In a corner of the altar there is only one old wooden image of the Buddha in meditation, of Indian make, perhaps contemporaneous with the foundation of the temple, brought from India by some devout pilgrim. We want to buy it; they are not willing; it is the deity

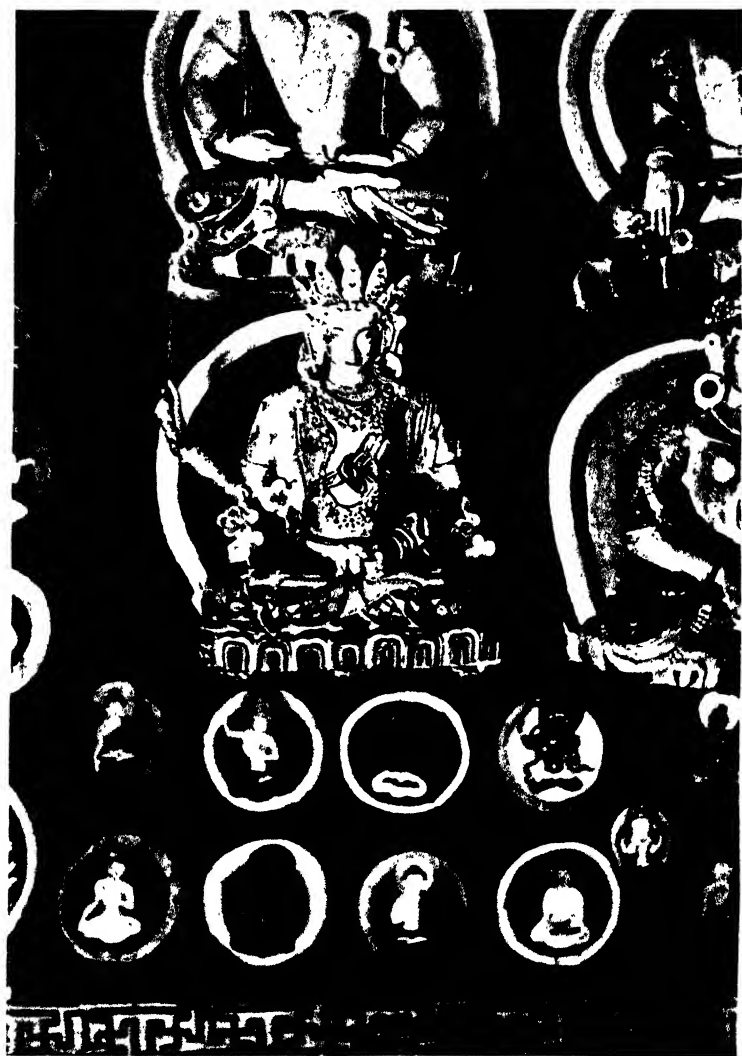
<sup>1</sup> *Lha lün Temple, Spyiti (Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, n. 39).* There is further information about this temple in the third volume of *Indo-Tibetica*.



INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE OF LHALUNG

*Facing p. 46*





INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE OF LHALUNG

which protects the village; the statue is sacred. It is of divine origin, not the work of man, *ranciùn* (*ran abyun*), as they say about all ancient things, "created by itself"; but, thrown away in a corner, blackened by age, made filthy with a thick coating of consecrated butter, this precious work of art, which ought to be studied with the greatest care, fills us with vexation.

14th July.

Tucci leaves the tent earlier than usual; he declares that he has seen this very image in a dream, and that he was urged to carry it away to his home and place it in his temple. The case is serious; the monks begin to confer together: the gods must be interrogated directly, in order to learn from them, who see things better than we do, what course ought to be adopted; the difficult question must be referred to the village magician. We climb in his company up to the temple, situated at the top of the declivity, like a hermitage. We enter. The light is feeble—that half-shadow which, blurring the outlines of things, almost draws us away from realities and predisposes us to dreams.

The priests who officiate in the ceremony take their places. In front of the principal altar they place a small table, on which they set out their magical instruments—the *dāmaru* or double drum, the *kanlîn*, that is, the macabre trumpet made from the left thigh-bone of a sixteen-year old girl, some silver jugs for holding holy water, vases and cups with grains of barley and *chàng* (Tibetan beer), rods, poniards, and coloured cloths. In front of the table, seated on the ground, the sorcerer, clad in a long white tunic, places on his head a many-coloured wig from which hangs down a tress made from strips of coloured material; he holds in his hand a sort of bundle

of canes bound together with silk cords, the whole tipped by an animal's horn. Three priests stand on the right and three on the left of the table.

One of the monks acts as the advocate for the village; the statue cannot abandon the community which it has protected for centuries; another defends Tucci and invokes the compassion of the god for the white pilgrim who has shown such faith in travelling hither from a distant land.

With the slow, measured roll of the drum, accompanied by the deafening clash of cymbals, the ceremony begins: the sorcerer, whilst waiting for the deity to descend into him, and through him as medium to express his will, is absorbed in meditation, whilst the assistants use a peacock's feather to sprinkle his face with consecrated water, and at intervals offer him to drink barley wine contained in a silver cup decorated on the outside with four skulls wrought in hammered relief. The Lamas, in hoarse and monotonous chanting, recite the formulas which are necessary to evoke the god, whilst the clangour of the instruments becomes infernal. Suddenly the brooding sorcerer is seized with a most violent fit of trembling which shakes him from head to foot, then he bounds to his feet like an uncoiling spring. His eyes are turned upwards till only the whites are visible, his breathing becomes convulsive, his jaws are clamped, all the muscles of his face are contracted as if in an attack of lockjaw, his physiognomy is completely changed, sweat breaks out over his head and hands. The phase of progressive stimulation lasts for some minutes; the difficulty of breathing has grown extremely acute, so that his mouth is shut tight and he breathes through his nostrils with a whistling sound.

The assistants try to make him drink, but it is not

an easy task; one can hear the violent rattle of the edge of the dish against his front teeth, whilst the wine is spilt over his vestments.

The monks standing around recite their rhythmic prayers with the terrified anxiety of those who are admitted to the portals of the supernatural. We two, crouching on the ground, have been awaiting with a certain trepidation the end of this performance which suddenly has revealed to us the deepest, unexplored recesses of the human soul, and seems to have unchained obscure forces which normally lie quiescent in the abysses of our consciousness.

Whilst the excitement is rising, the sorcerer takes handfuls of barley and throws them right and left; a few grains remain in his hands and the assistants count them carefully. If the number is odd it is regarded as a good sign; if even, it is a negative reply.

The ceremony is repeated three times. Finally the divinity reveals himself completely, and the exalted one begins to speak in a falsetto voice interrupted by the gnashing of his teeth as they come together convulsively; the words are so rapid and so fragmentary that not even the priests succeed in grasping the meaning of them. All of them, however, make profound obeisances, for it is the god who is speaking, and every minute they repeat the word *ciagzàl* (*p'yag ats'al*), which means "homage".

The possessed one then makes some rapid revolutions; the assistants hold out the statue to him. The convulsive movements seem to redouble in intensity. He takes the statue with trembling hands and offers it to Tucci, who places it on his head as must always be done when a sacred object is given into one's keeping; then he falls into profound meditation. Some minutes pass in silence: the sorcerer enters on the diminishing

phase of inspiration. The divinity is about to leave him. The assistants remove his wig and other priestly accessories. The convulsions cease, the breathing becomes normal, two strong shudders end the ceremony.

The sorcerer re-opens his eyes like a man in a dream; he has the appearance of an epileptic who after the fit does not understand where he is. The statue thus goes of its own free will, contrary to the decision of the inhabitants, down to our tents in the sixteenth camp. After sunset, perhaps at the very time when in the houses of Lhalung people are discussing the unexpected reply of the divinity, Kalil repairs stealthily to the sorcerer's dwelling, that the latter may have no cause to complain of our generosity.

15th July, Drangkhar.

After a march of three hours we arrive at Drangkhar,<sup>1</sup> the capital of Spiti, and rejoin our caravan.

Drangkhar appears to have stood conspicuous on a perpendicular rock which overlooks the river; only the ruins of the old royal castle remain. The storms of war have swept over this land; Zoravar with his Dogra must have been for it a veritable scourge. The houses, about thirty of them, stand back to back with the tottering city-walls and the other ruins of the ancient city. The churches are amongst the few things saved; but even they are ravaged and impoverished. Now the place is the capital only in name; in fact the Nono resides in his family house in a little village on the right bank of the Spiti at Kyuling,<sup>2</sup> almost opposite to Kaze.

We visit the various *Lha k'an* in the village; back to back almost with each other, built one above the other.

<sup>1</sup> In some manuscripts the form is *Dran mk'ar*, as it also appears in some inscriptions; *gram mk'ar* is perhaps a corruption.

<sup>2</sup> In the inscriptions of Kaze: *skyu gliñ*; but in the modern form: *skyid gliñ*.



FRESCOES IN THE TEMPLES OF DRANGKHAR



FRESCOES IN THE TEMPLES OF DRANGKHAR

They are small, almost falling in pieces, with the mural pictures damaged by the water which drips from the leaky, dirty, crumbling ceilings.

Each has its name: *adus K'añ*, or assembly hall of the chapter, is the lowest and largest; *zim cuñ* that in the middle; *nañ ga ts'añ*, the highest of all.

The generic name, however, for all these cells is *Zla 'od dgon pa*, "the monastery of *Zla 'od*"; perhaps in memory of one of the greatest translators of the Buddhist writings from Sanskrit into Tibetan.

The *adus k'añ* once contained frescoes of some value; there still remain figures of *Padmasambhava*, *Vijayā*, *Tārā*, *Śākyamuni*; Tucci copies the long inscription which Francke did not succeed in reading. It contains the name of the monk who built the cell and who had had painted the pictures of some deity, probably of the seventeenth century. Then we mount to the other temple, which, besides the usual life of Buddha, painted on a band which serves as a plinth for the larger pictures, contains paintings which seem to record scenes of events taking place at the foundation of the temple and which represent long processions of women bearing offerings; these pictures are of great interest as regards the history of costume in Western Tibet. Amongst the best preserved frescoes we note and photograph that which represents a Lama clad in the usual sacred robes (*c'os sgos*), and having the hands posed in the mystic attitude of preaching (*dharmacakramudrā*). It might have been *Tsoñ K'a pa*, but it is quite possible that it is intended for an *ācārya*, or teacher, whom, for want of inscriptions, we cannot identify with any more precision.

On the right of this figure, a little higher up and of smaller proportions, is a monk dressed in white; the colour of the dress tells at once that he is a *ras pa*, one



of those ascetics of the school of *Milaraspa* (pron. Milarèpa) who were accustomed to wear cassocks of rough cotton. But the characteristic cap enables us to identify him with greater certainty; he is *Tagzanrepà* (*sTag ts'ans ras pa*) the celebrated founder of the monastery of Hemis, who lived in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and the earlier part of the seventeenth.

This painting gives us therefore important chronological evidence respecting the utmost limit to which we can trace, if not the temple itself, at least its frescoes.

Many idols of bronze and of wood are crowded into the last chapel; most noteworthy some which have eyes of silver with the pupils in black metal. It is an artistic type almost certainly local which perpetuates ancient traditions. They are generally very ancient statues which must be considered as characteristic of Western Tibet and the province of Guge. We shall find many such during our travels and we shall try to collect outstanding examples expressly for their great historical importance, as being not unworthy relics of schools which had reached their zenith and completely disappeared, as happened to the paintings of Guge, under the direct influence of Indian art. Even in the province of Kangra we have seen many small statues of Hindu gods which show the same characters. During our visit here in Drangkhar it is impossible to buy anything. We are followed by a train of curious and suspicious people who would howl at the scandalous idea if proposals for acquiring anything were to be made. These people perhaps love money more than they fear the wrath of gods enraged by sacrilegious bargain-making, but they are restrained by their horror of disgrace. The priests themselves, if the objects are not registered in the convent lists, do not hesitate to part with such statues,

pictures and manuscripts provided the price is good, and soon pacify their consciences and quiet their scruples, provided that there are no witnesses. We therefore do nothing more than indicate to Kalll by signs the things which interest us most, and he will attend to the business of drawing aside the custodians of the convent or the Lama, and setting going with them the interminable chaffering for the acquisition of the things in which we are most deeply interested. In these villages one must never be in a hurry; any one who stays only for a few hours in a village will be able to see nothing, because time must be allowed for gaining the confidence and goodwill of these suspicious mountaineers, jealously watchful of their traditions and their beliefs. On the other hand the investigations which we propose to make would not succeed without the free and unconditional co-operation of the people and above all of the Lamas; our progress as a consequence is slow and our halts are relatively prolonged.

Throughout all Spiti, as in Ladakh, the women work much harder than the men; unless there are urgent tasks in the fields, the latter sit at their ease in the village spinning wool with great distaffs or turning the prayer-mill, a convenient system which enables them to provide for the welfare of the soul whilst at the same time getting other business done which is not always spiritual. When one arrives in a village the female population is all in the fields; and, as if the two sexes had interchanged duties, the men are keeping watch over the houses and the children, and follow one about like a shadow wherever one goes.

But generally speaking they are so gay and jovial that we are willing to pardon their provoking curiosity. Polyandry, it is clear, is in force here also.

*17th July, Po.*

We leave the capital for the camp at Po. The Spiti, up to this point exceptionally wide, suddenly narrows a few miles from Po; the waters which had flowed so sluggishly now become turbulent, forced into a narrow channel between precipitous rocky banks.

At Po, for the first time since we left Manāli, we find trees again; we have descended again to 3500 metres. We meet here the ugliest people we have ever seen. The women are like witches, and the men, with their long flowing hair, have faces worthy of the gallows; even the Lama of the village possesses none too reassuring an aspect. Here there is nothing Tibetan but the language. As an anthropological type the race is quite different.

In the course of the march we meet the Nono of Spiti, still a youth, who has not only come to pay us respect but who would like to sell us Chinese mandarins' robes. We have no special interest in things of this kind, and besides, the sum he asks is such that even a collector would not be able to accede to his request.

*18th July, Tabo.*

We have to give up the road usually taken which runs along the bank of the river, for violent floods have swallowed it up in some places.

Trusting to the contradictory information given by various people, we proceed by a path which, at about a mile from Po, winds tortuously upwards across a precipitous cliff-face and emerges on a narrow plain suddenly intersected by a perpendicular gorge about 150 metres wide and at least 200 deep.

At the bottom of it lies the narrow, arid bed of a stream which must empty itself into the Spiti. This is



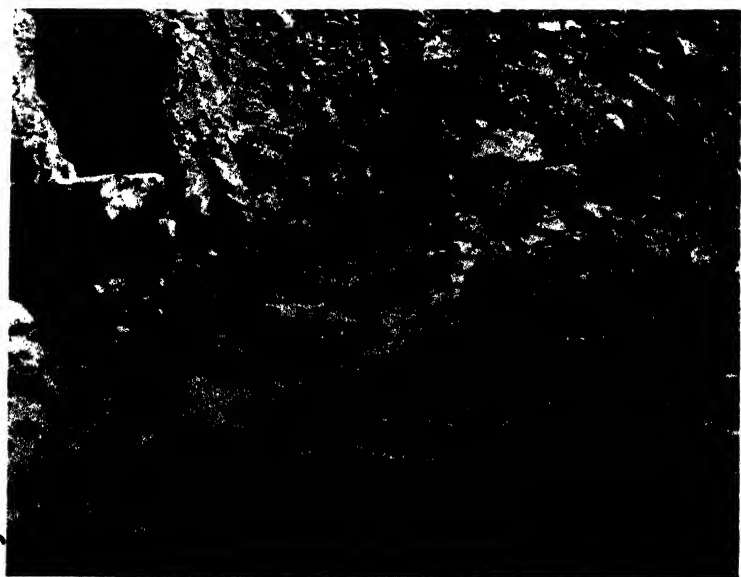
NATIVE OF PO



THE NONO OF SPITI



ON THE MARCH TOWARDS TABO



ON THE BANKS OF THE SPITI

the only way to reach Tabo.<sup>1</sup> The descent of the caravan is brimful of excitement; whilst Ghersi is cinematographing from down below he gets the impression that at any moment the whole caravan may come tumbling down. The horses perform miracles of equilibrium; the most heavily laden are made to descend very very slowly, whilst the drivers, keeping tight grasp on the reins, hold them back by the tail. Clouds of yellow dust, raised by the falling stones, envelop everything. Even in the bed of the stream the risks are not ended; the horses have to climb down gigantic steps two or three metres high excavated by the erosion of the water; the drivers expend intense labour on filling up holes, levelling projecting rocks, opening up passages.

At the end of an hour and a half we return to the light on the banks of the Spiti.

The path is traced out across the middle of the ascent, above an extremely steep and treacherous slope; far below us, the river, foaming and thundering, races onwards at mad speed. One false step and the end is certain.

Towards midday we ford a tributary of the Spiti, and shortly afterwards arrive at Tabo, celebrated for the great monastery founded by *Rin c'en bzai po*.

This is our nineteenth camp.

19th-20th July.

We pitch the tents under a large apricot tree in the vicinity of the boundary wall of the great monastery.

A wide plain, yellowish, sandy and disintegrating; on every side naked and barren mountains. On one very high peak in the north there still lingers a wide patch of snow. A lay custodian and two monks constitute the

<sup>1</sup> For the spelling of the name v. *Indo-Tibetica*, II, p. 72.

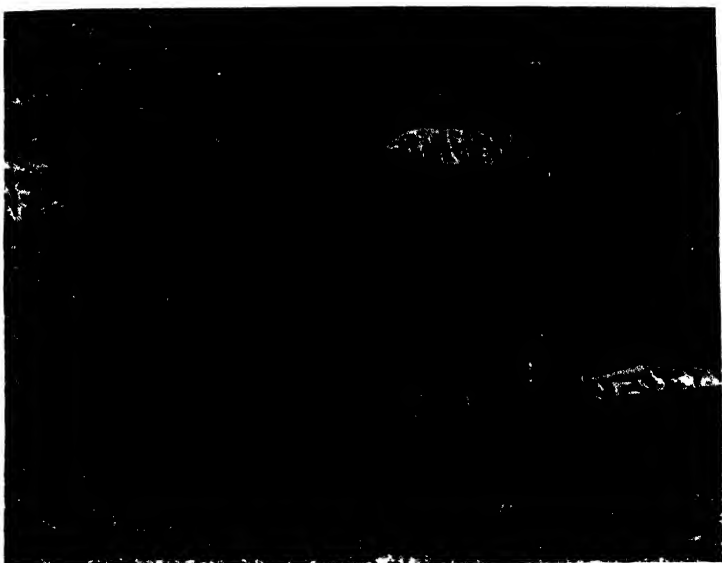
total population of the monastery. The village is about half a kilometre farther on; few houses, poor people; the richest and most influential family is that of the doctor. The *gompà* is composed of eight churches, the largest of which is called generically the *gTs'ug lag k'an*; and beyond doubt it is also the most ancient.

Built by *Rin c'en bzai po*, it has undergone various alterations; a great part of the present-day structure perhaps goes no farther back than the fourteenth century, but it contains, nevertheless, statues and frescoes of the greatest interest, not only for the history of art in Western Tibet, but also for the study of Buddhistic iconography.

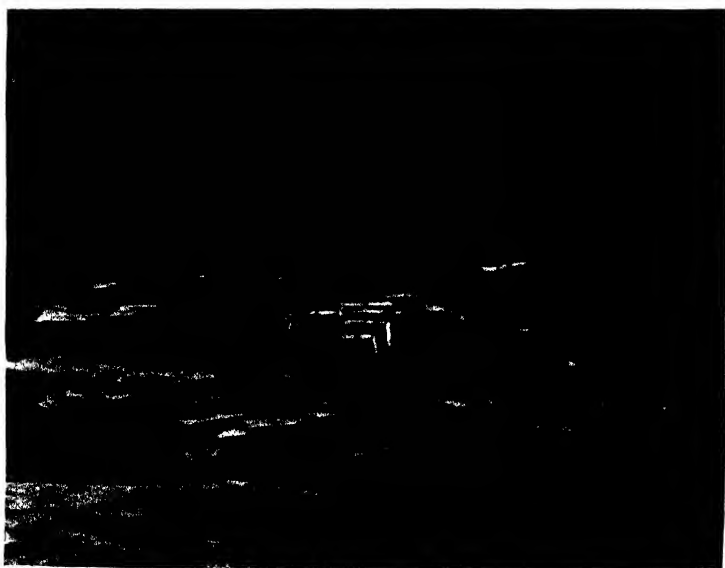
We make another plan of it, for that of Francke does not seem to us to be exact, and then we begin the study of the temple in all its details.<sup>1</sup>

To the left of the entrance door of the *gTsug lag k'an*, in a long frieze, the story of *Nor bzai*, one of the most popular in Tibet, is represented in a continuous series of paintings which illustrate the legend pictorially; on the right the twelve principal incidents in the life of the Buddha, for the most part obliterated by time and stained by water. In the centre of the church is a quadruple statue in stucco of Vairocana, and round the walls thirty-three statues, also of stucco, nearly life-size, executed with rare perfection and painted in various colours. Francke regarded these effigies as the thirty-three deities of the Hindu pantheon; surely a strange idea, when one considers that these thirty-three deities constitute a literary assemblage rather than a living religious reality in the experience of the people, and that if any other

<sup>1</sup> The description which is given of Tabo in this chronicle is necessarily very brief; in volume III of *Indo-Tibetica*, which is already in the press, Tucci has studied this temple exhaustively, has reproduced in plates all its stuccoes and frescoes, and has illustrated every detail of it from the archæological and artistic point of view as well as from the iconographic and religious.



FORMULÆ AND PRAYERS—ON THE WAY TO  
TABO



THE MONASTERY OF TABO





THE CENTRAL ALTAR OF THE TEMPLE AT TABO



STATUES IN STUCCO IN THE TEMPLE OF TABO

Hindu divinities like Brahmā and Indra were admitted to Buddhistic iconography as acolytes of the Buddha, they would not be given, for obvious reasons, so dominating a position. Tucci has succeeded in finding literary and liturgical documents which have enabled him to identify the religious cycle represented on these walls, which even the modern Lamas, profoundly ignorant of their religion, no longer know the meaning of. It is the mystic cycle of Sarvavid-Vairocana connected specially with some schools of the Tantra whose introduction into Tibet is actually due to *Rin c'en bzan po*, so that these temples form as it were the architectural and plastic symbol of the wonderful work as a translator and as an apostle which this great saint carried on in the land of the snows.

The *lotsāva*, "the translators", as are styled these interpreters of Buddhist thought, are not only grammarians capable of rendering, in their own tongue, the doctrinal and liturgical treatises of the Buddhism of the *Mahāyāna*, but above all are ascetics who, having travelled to India and learnt after long years of novitiate, the mystic teachings, have brought them into their own country, not indeed as an arid formula embodied in books, but as vital knowledge. These Tibetan temples were not built by them to be centres of idolatry, as to some extent they became later, but as symbols of those truths and those mystic revelations which were expressed under the veil, more or less thick, of the literature of the Tantra. Once the mystic cycle indicated by the statues of Tabo has been traced out—and there has been discovered the ritualistic literature which illustrates it and which is derived from Indian schools—it is possible to identify, using as evidence the gestures of the hands and the colours, the various divinities of which it is composed.

In the niche at the far end of the *gTsug lag k'an* there is *Amitābha*, and on the walls the thousand Buddhas of the *bhadrakalpa*, of the cosmic era, that is, in which we live; and in the lower part scenes from the foundation of the temple and the figures of monks and benefactors who contributed with their munificence to its construction. Of the library there remain only scanty fragments, above all of the *Prajñāpāramitā* which, if they are not contemporary with the foundation of the temple, may certainly be regarded as copies, several centuries old and exceedingly faithful, of the most sacred dogmatic texts of the Buddhism of the "Great Career"; wretched vestiges of one of the most famous places and one of the most active centres of Buddhism in Western Tibet, if it is true, as is registered in the chronicles, that in this convent, in the thirteenth century there assembled, by the desire of the kings of Guge, a council in which the most celebrated doctors and teachers in Tibet took part.

The *dKyl k'an*, or cell in which the neophytes were admitted after their long novitiate and where they were baptized into the esoteric doctrines in which the master considered them worthy to participate, is now nothing but a modest little chapel, in which the water which finds entry from every part, has spoilt the walls, buried the floor under mud, and obliterated almost all the *maṇḍala* which used to decorate it. These *maṇḍala* are not magic circles, as very often they are assumed to be, but pictorial symbols of mystic plains, access to which was shown by the Tantra. To be admitted into the presence of the sacred "diagram" meant receiving the initiatory revelation of the doctrine, capable, according to these schools, of conferring salvation when from mere knowledge it was transmuted into that reality and that psychological possession which bring about the regener-

STATUES IN STUCCO  
IN THE CELL OF THE  
TEMPLE OF TABO





CIORTÈN OF TABO



DANCE IN THE MONASTERY OF TABO

ation of the neophyte. The deciphering of them enables us to identify the doctrines which regulated in the main the spiritual life of the ancient religious communities.

In the chapel of *Byams pa*, is enthroned a great statue of *Maitreya*, the Buddha of the age to come, seated in European style; all the rest is ruin.

The large chapel of *aBrom ston* contains somewhat valuable pictures, probably executed under the kings of Ladakh in the seventeenth century.

Besides these there are no statues; only ancient capitals and a door of deodar wood, the work perhaps of Indian artists whom the kings of Guge brought from Kashmir.

Such are the sole vestiges of a temple which at one time enjoyed such glorious renown. And in a few years, if no one hastens to repair it, all the little which remains will also have disappeared. It is incredible that these magnificent relics of a great past should be so carelessly tended to-day; poverty accounts to some degree for the neglect, indolence for some. But the character with which an edifice is invested by the initial ceremony of consecration is never lost, whatever may be its state of preservation. A ruin is no less worthy of respect and veneration than is a temple in official use; the gods, once installed, never forsake it; and as every consideration, æsthetic, artistic or archæological is totally unknown amongst these people, for whom only the sacred character has interest or value, it is evident that the preservation of a temple, however important it may appear to us, takes, in Tibet, a subordinate place. In spite of every vicissitude the temple and its ruins will always remain a sacred place. If anyone thinks of restoring it it is because he wishes to acquire a religious reputation, because to rebuild or restore a sacred building generates good *karma*, useful not only to the donor, but, by virtue

of the transmission of merit admitted by the *Mahāyāna*, also to his relatives or in general to all creatures.<sup>1</sup>

But this liberality, more or less interested, was possible when the kings of Western Tibet or their successors of Ladakh had this village and its temples under their protection; now that the region is impoverished and the faith is beginning to decline, the convents are unfortunately left to their own resources and those of the communities which have neither the means nor the piety requisite for restoring and maintaining them.

Within a steep-faced, crumbling cliff, to the east of the monastery, a series of small deserted cells used to form the winter quarters of the monks; many of them were also true *zamcàn* (*ts'ams k'añ*) or cells for retreat where the Lamas would shut themselves up for long periods, often for twelve consecutive years, without holding any communication whatever with the outside world, in order to devote themselves to their meditation and their visions. Now all is lonely and abandoned. It is as if a devastating wind had passed over this land, and had annihilated along with the life of the soul every human activity, had made barren the soil and had laid a curse on everything.

We explore one after the other the *chortèn* (*mc'od rten*) which are scattered over the valley round the monastery; some of them are large, some small, often in rows of a hundred and eight, a sacred number in the liturgy of Buddhism.

On a rectangular base is placed a kind of large sphere more or less flat on the top, and then a series of overlapping wheels which symbolize different moments in the spiritual Buddhistic progress or the essential elements of its dogma. On the base there is often a small window

<sup>1</sup> v. *Indo-Tibetica*, I, pp. 24 et seq.

which opens into a little cavity in the interior in which are deposited sacred things, worn-out and useless, books and especially *ts'a ts'a*. The English call these last "potted Lamas"; they are a kind of medallion made of clay dried in the sun, on which have been impressed with applied copper stamps images of divinities and famous saints; often they are true and original relics, because compounded of clay and the ashes of Lamas famous for wisdom or sanctity.

Sometimes, perhaps to make them more resistant and more suitable for preservation, they are varnished or coloured, or even baked; in the great monasteries they are distributed to pilgrims, who preserve them devoutly in their *Gau*, the small silver or copper reliquaries, round, square or shaped like miniature temples, which they always wear hung from the neck or the waist-belt, as safeguards from every danger.

Some have engraved on them formulas in Sanskrit which express, in a language unintelligible to most of the people, mystic formulas (*dhâraṇî* and *mantra*) which contain in the symbol of the word the quintessence of Buddhist teaching; almost all brought from India, they constitute an eloquent indication of those spiritual bonds and that lengthy association which once united the land of the snows with the land of *Śākyamuni*. These *ts'a ts'a* throw strong light also on the diffusion of religious sects in ancient Tibet, and for that reason we make a large collection of them, promising a rupee for every new type which is presented to us. In this way also the superstitious scruples of the laity and the priests are appeased and our collection is increased in rapid style.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The reader is recommended to consult *Indo-Tibetica*, I, concerning *chortên* and *ts'a ts'a*. In a volume to follow will be illustrated the *ts'a ts'a* collected on this journey.



21st July, Lori.

Only three miles downstream from Tabo we make our twentieth camp, under the great apricot trees of Lori, the last village in the state of Spiti, like an oasis of verdure on the verge of the sun-baked and arid desert of Hurling, in which converge the frontiers of three states—Spiti, Bashahr and Tibet. The inhabitants of Lori are distinctly affected by the nearness of India or rather of northern Bashahr, both in their physique and in their dress; generally there is lacking in them the manly and robust aspect of the mountaineers of Spiti, characterized by that sincere look which inspires confidence; they on the other hand give the impression of being indolent, indifferent, mistrustful; some wear their hair long and dishevelled, and their clothing is in an extraordinary state of raggedness.

If we did not know that at heart they are worthy people, we might be terrified by their boorish, ferocious appearance. In one private house the chapel preserves traces of mural pictures of fair antiquity; we remember that, according to the biographies of *Rin c'en bzah po*, the great Buddhist apostle built a temple in this village; this half-ruined church is probably the remains of it.

22nd July, Zangzam Bridge.

We start early on the march towards the desert of Hurling; we are in a mountainous zone, absolutely barren, about thirty miles long, in which the Spiti describes a great curve sweeping round towards the south to unite with the Sutlej in the neighbourhood of Namgia. A few miles from Lori, under the rocks of Pangdom which fall perpendicularly to the river, the path becomes excessively narrow and is interrupted frequently by enormous steps hewn out in the rock, which oblige us

often to unload the horses and transport the boxes on the men's shoulders, whilst below us the river, confined between two rocky and very steep banks, rushes onwards with deafening noise and violence. We are surrounded by strangely contorted mountains, furrowed in their thick micaceous strata, on which there play with a thousand reflections the rays of a burning sun in a yellow, stony desert; even in the air, within the cloud of dust raised by the caravan, there is a magic phosphorescence of scintillating grains. We stop for lunch, about mid-day, on the banks of the Karitha, a fair-sized tributary of the Spiti, whilst the caravan proceeds, under the command of Kalll, towards the Pare-Chu, the banks of which we must, at any cost, reach before night, because the road is very unsafe and has no water-supply.

We ourselves, in order to quench our thirst have to fill our flasks with the turbid water of the Karitha, muddy and black as ink; it does no good to leave it to settle. It is so full of mica and sand that it seems almost as if one were swallowing the filthiest soup; and it is useless for allaying our thirst. We search in vain for the first of the historical inscriptions mentioned by Francke<sup>1</sup> which should exist along this road somewhere near Hurling; instead, we identify the second, but, with the best will in the world, we cannot read in it the name of *Byan c'ub'od*.

Then we also resume our march over the burning sand, in a heavy, dust-laden atmosphere which is suffocating; around us the most solemn silence; in front an interminable series of pale yellow hills, on which from time to time our caravan appears and disappears as it slowly climbs the hills and then descends into the bare, sun-drenched valleys. Ruddy, ferruginous rocks, striated

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquities of Tibet*, Vol. I, p. 36.

in alternate bands of white and black and thrust up into fearsome contortions, crown this land which almost fascinates us with its desolate terror.

In the distance, towards the south-east, rise high into the heavens like three pyramids clad in snow and ice, the superb summits of Leo-Purgul, the inviolate seat of the god Purgul.

It is a little after sunset when we enter the valley of the Pare-Chu; the panorama suddenly changes; no longer contorted and coloured rocks, no longer the very fine micaceous sand, but a porous rock like pumice, uniformly grey and blackish, the crater-like depressions of old blow-holes and hot sulphurous springs indicate the volcanic origin of the region. Down below on the left bank of the river, Kalil has already pitched the tents in the shelter of some great rocks which may serve as protection against landslides; the little flag with the national colours is fluttering in the evening breeze, bestowing a note of gaiety on our camp which, this evening, seems more isolated and more mournful. In the east we see the road to Chumurti disappear in the savage defile.

*23rd July, Chang.*

We set out some hours late because the ponies have not returned in time from the distant grassy plains which with poor verdure encircle the snow-limit; the drivers had taken them there last night in search of a little pasturage, because in the place where we are making our halt there does not grow a single blade of grass.

The road is fairly good; only a powerful stream which in the course of years has excavated in the readily destructible rock a very deep, narrow channel, obliges the caravan to make a fatiguing and wearisome detour not without its adventures; then we move on into a

ravine of yellowish sandy rock, a narrow passage where we can see no farther than two or three metres ahead. Suddenly this corridor opens out on a green, well-watered valley in the midst of which there appear the white houses of Chang, the last village in the state of Bashahr, in the direction of the frontier of Spiti. Three settlements are established on a stretch of land composed of alluvial and detrital material which slopes from the foothills of the Leo-Purgyl down to the river; all around are numerous broad terraces bearing crops of barley and wheat and intersected by canals which provide irrigation the whole year round.

We make our camp in the middle town, in the shade of a row of trees near a brook in which flows spring water.

Here Abdūl will be able to give us proof of his culinary skill; up till now we have eaten only preserved meat. But one cannot live for ever on tinned stuff, even if it is prepared with the scrupulous skill of a Cirio. Here at Chang we find fowls for the first time; but the people sell them very unwillingly, for they know what will be the fate of the poor creatures and they do not wish to co-operate, even indirectly, in the violation of the law of the *ahimsā*, the prohibition against killing anything whatever which has life, which is in force in Buddhism as well as in Hinduism. Tenzin, one of our servants, has to say that he wants to carry the poultry to his own country for breeding purposes.

It is quite true that in this district there already begins to be felt the influence, distant and indirect though it be, of the Hindu orthodoxy which predominates in the state of Bashahr; but, probably, at the bottom of this excessive scrupulousness of the people, there lurks something of speculation: with the excuse of the *ahimsā*,

one may force the foreigner to pay dearly for everything. If one has to sin, it is well to extract from the iniquity the highest possible profit.

The nearness of the state of Bashahr is indicated also by the dress. The men wear their hair long like the pages of ancient days, their graceful caps being of white wool with a band of black velvet; the coat is of rough wool, cut in the shape of a long tunic having two side openings bound with dark material; they are very fond of flowers; the women adorn their hair with them, and the men their hats. The priests no longer wear the red tunic of the Lamas, but the ordinary great-coat of the laymen and are distinguished from these only by the Buddhist rosary which they wear round their neck.

It is evident that we are in a border country, in which, alongside Lamaism, introduced from Tibet, there linger indigenous cults and traditions of great antiquity, and the influence, more or less clear, of Hinduism. It constitutes a superposition of beliefs of the greatest interest to the student of religions; Lamaism, in this country, as generally in all northern Kunāvar, is very impure; here its last fluctuations are becoming confluent with Hinduism. *Rin c'en bzai pa*, with moderate success, conquered the aboriginal cults here; the kings of Guge who mastered it built temples here and completed the work of conversion to Buddhism. The Hindu dynasties of Bashahr favoured the revival of local traditions more or less coloured with Hinduism; now there is a notable tendency to return to Lamaism due, above all, to the apostolic propaganda work of certain missionaries and "Incarnates", particularly of the sects *rNin ma pa* and *dGe lugs pa*, who, attracted by the wealth of the country and by the magnificence of its valleys, which seem



TEMPLE AND RUINS OF THE CASTLE OF CHANG



INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE OF CHANG

*Facing p. 66*



TYPES FROM NORTHERN KUNAVAR

favourable to their meditations and their mystic raptures, are establishing themselves here with a continually increasing following and are making converts here. There are some at Li, at Poo, at Lippa; and, which is strange, they are almost all from Khams, on the borders of China. That explains how some of the very small number of the more cultured Lamas of northern Kunāvar, an ascetic of Po and a doctor of Chini, have completed their education and received the mystic initiations in that distant province.

24th July,

Keeping always on the right hand a very long *mani*,<sup>1</sup> we betake ourselves in the morning to visit an old temple and the ruins of the castle built at the top of a steep hill which overlooks the village and slopes down to the right bank of the river.<sup>2</sup> The temple is old, blackened with smoke, and in great disorder, because the priest who has the custody of it is lacking; the frescoes have all disappeared and some, perhaps, are hidden by crude pictures of very recent date.

On the altar, in the centre, is an ugly statue of *Pad-masambhava*. The temple, however, does not belong to the *rNin ma pa*; but to the *aBrug pa*, the most widely diffused sect in northern Kunāvar, whose influence radiates from the *Gompā* of Tashigang which we ought to visit in a few days. Only here and there, owing as we have said to the influence of certain Lamas, do there exist small isolated *rNin ma pa* or *dGe lugs pa*.

Neither this temple, nor the other much more important one in the centre of the village, was visited by

<sup>1</sup> This is the name given to the characteristic low walls covered with stones on which is carved the prayer: *om mani padme hūm*, v. *Indo-Tibetica*, I, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> The name of the village as spelt in some inscriptions would be: *Cañ* (pron. *chán*) *mK'ar*, the castle of *Chán*. *Chán* is also the name of the river which flows between the castle and the village proper.



Francke; indeed he does not seem to have had any information about the second.

It seems to have been dedicated to *dPal ldan Lhamo*, *Śrīmatī-devī*; it is small and dark.

The walls, blackened and smoke-laden, bear traces, however, of most remarkable frescoes of great value from the historical, iconographical and religious point of view.

Near the figures of the commoner divinities of the Lamaistic pantheon, are gods and goddesses of the infernal regions which Tucci, by means of certain manuscripts and xylographs, succeeds in identifying. They are the *narag*, the divinities connected with the cult of the dead and the ceremonies of *p'o ba*, which are bound to secure the rebirth of the dying person either in one of the Buddhistic Paradises or in happy states of existence, projecting into these his *Ego*, his consciousness, which, until Nirvāṇa is reached, represents for Lamaism the nucleus and the continuity of the human personality.<sup>1</sup>

25th July, Nako.

A march of three hours to Nako,<sup>2</sup> a village much larger than Chang and like that composed of three townships built on three spurs of the mountain, separated by three streams which are fed by the neighbouring snowfields of the Purgul.

At the first houses, in the middle of a crowd of curious people, the *lamberdār* or headman of the village is awaiting us; after the usual exchange of courtesies, he kindly escorts us to a shady place on the shore of a picturesque little lake, where we are to pitch our camp. We are directly under the Purgul which, like a savage bulwark all battlements and spires and prominences, separates

<sup>1</sup> For the detailed study of this temple reference should be made to Volume III of *Indo-Tibetica*.

<sup>2</sup> In some other manuscripts: *Na go*.

Western Tibet from the state of Bashahr. Its peaks, which rear themselves vertically like gigantic walls, are almost constantly hidden by mist. An eternal tempest seems to rage up there, as if the god wished to hide his abode from the eyes of the profane. Thence come the waters which endow the soil with fertility, thence too come the gales which bring destruction on man and his works. The god who lives up there is the local protecting deity or *sabdag* of Nako and the neighbouring villages; he protects the district, the people invoke him for the agricultural festivals, and sing his praises in various popular songs which are certainly of very ancient origin, and of which Tucci has gathered the manuscript renderings. More particularly at wedding celebrations, they recite hymns which originated very long ago, previous, as regards their fundamental nucleus, to the introduction of Buddhism and which have preserved invocations and rites very distinctly Bonpo in character. There is no village in which we do not collect some examples of them. The spelling of the name of this celebrated mountain is one of the most uncertain: Purgyul (Francke), Purgeol (Gerard), Porgial (*Geographical Features of the Survey of India*, 1863), Riwa Phargyul (Morshead), a form accepted as probable by Burrard and Heron.<sup>1</sup> In the copy of the songs of Purgyul which we found at Nako, it reads—*Pu yul*; in other manuscripts—*Spur k'yul*; probably the Tibetan name is *Spur yul*; a very well-known reminiscence of Indian mythological geography is *pretapuri*, the city or the country of the *preta*, that is to say the shades of the dead.<sup>2</sup>

But we must not forget that in this zone intermediate

<sup>1</sup> *A Sketch of the Geography and Geology of the Himalaya Mountains and Tibet*, Part I: The High Peaks of Asia, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> The confirmation of this theory we find in the songs of *Shar-rgan*, in which *Pretapuri* is recorded as being near Poo.

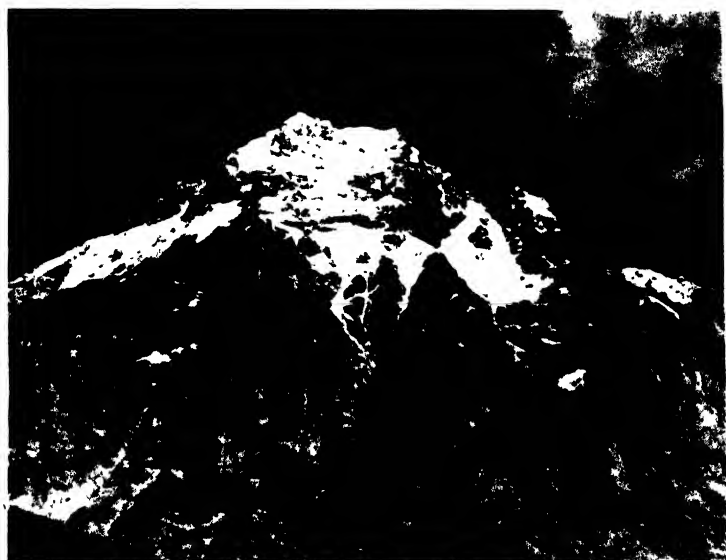
between Tibet and India and in these same border provinces of Western Tibet we are very often confronted with an indigenous toponomy which, at a later period, after the penetration of Lamaism, has acquired a Tibetan appearance, in respect to its assonances and its more or less arbitrary etymology.

There is no doubt that the original races of this country spoke languages different from Tibetan, which, even if they have disappeared from common use or are on the way to disappearing, have left traces in place-names, and sometimes survive side by side with the purely Tibetan form; as a characteristic example we have Chumurti which is composed of the Tibetan *c'u*, water, and *murti*, which even to-day in Kunāvāri means "spring".

26th July.

In a small chapel at the crossing of two roads there is a rock which for centuries has received the devout homage of the faithful; on it tradition professes to recognize the imprint of the hand of Padmasambhava. It is a greenish stone, very common in this region and not very hard, which is easily eroded by water, so that there are often traced out on it curious shapes which may bear a resemblance to monstrous animals, or, more frequently, to human imprints which the imagination of the people attribute to the gods most highly venerated or feared.

In this particular case we cannot see how they have identified the hand of the great master in a rather irregular effect of erosion. Much more noteworthy than this imprint are the mural paintings, such few as still remain, which date back in all probability to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Besides the usual figures of Amitābha, Śākyamuni, &c., there is a Tārā and a Loka-



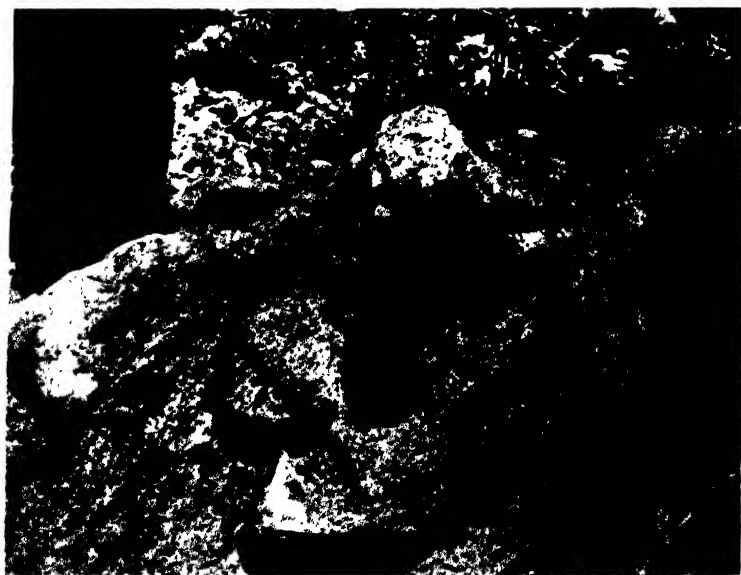
THE LEO-PURGYUL FROM THE PASS OF SHIPKI



THE GROUP OF THE LEO-PURGYUL SEEN FROM  
NAMGIA



IMPRINT OF THE HAND OF PADMASAMBHAVA



IMPRINT OF THE FOOT OF THE GOD PURGYUL

nātha of very fine execution to the left of the door.

The most interesting by far is the other temple which rises on a plain to the south-west of the village and which is assigned by local tradition to *Rin c'en bzai po*. It is quite probable; but there is no doubt that the various chapels have undergone re-building and re-touching. There remain only some stucco statues which represent the sacred pentad of the supreme Buddhas and a beautiful image also in stucco of a female divinity (and not of *Ratnasambhava*, as Francke suggests), probably *Prajñāpāramitā*. And then in this chapel said to belong to the "Translator", that is to *Rin c'en bzai po*, as well as in the other known by the name of *gTsug lag k'añ* there are remains of frescoes, most important being some *maṇḍala* connected with the cycle of Vairocana. We are confronted with schools of religion identical with those which built the temple of Tabo;<sup>1</sup> we photograph these precious symbols which throw much light on the beliefs and practices by means of which an unknown multitude of ascetics once gained comfort and inspiration in these very valleys of Spiti, of Northern Kunāvar and Guge. They created a new culture and roused an enthusiasm which was to spread throughout the whole of Tibet. The Tibetan historians and chroniclers perceived this clearly, since, after the apostasy of *gLang-darma*, which threatened the consolidation of Buddhism in the country of the snows, and appeared as if it would rekindle the ancient Bonpo cults, they speak of the new penetration of Buddhism as an event of fundamental importance in the cultural and spiritual history of all Tibet, and they recognize that it originated in the very regions through which we are now passing.

<sup>1</sup> The temples of Nako have also been treated fully in Vol. III of *Indo-Tibetica* which will be published shortly.

We are travelling along the very roads used in the tenth and eleventh centuries by Tibetan *lotsāwa* and Indian pundits; the former travelled down them into India that they might learn from teachers and ascetics, in famous universities or hermitages, the sacred doctrines or the mystic experiences through which they hoped to gain salvation; the latter, on the contrary, driven out by the first Mohammedan invasions, disheartened by the powerful revival of Hinduism, persecuted by the evil government of several dynasties, climbed these savage roads of the Himalayas, in whose valleys and on whose plains lived a rude pastoral people who had accepted with the enthusiasm of the convert the teaching of the Buddha. And from their collaboration there sprang not only the complete conversion of the population, but there was born that Lamaism which, embodying in itself many characters peculiar to itself and markedly Tibetan, perpetuated in the land of the snows the grand doctrinal conceptions and the profound mystical experiences of the *mahāyāna*. When it is better known, not only in its forms, but above all in the inner significance of its ceremonies and its formulas, people will understand what a mistake it is to label comprehensively, as a confused medley of gross magic, one of the mystical creeds most worthy of study and one of the most profoundly felt of uplifting beliefs.

At the present moment, Lamaism is passing through a period of decadence, there is no doubt about it; but it is impossible through the medium of modern manifestations, or of what is clearly degenerate in character, or merely by rites and ceremonies the inner meaning of which is unknown, to form an estimate of a religion from which inspiration was drawn by mystics who were amongst the greatest that humanity knows. That this has

been possible is a sign that Lamaism contains elements of the loftiest spiritual value.

After leaving the temple, a priest conducts us to see a great rock, on which—so he says—there is a venerable imprint which tradition attributes to the god Purg-yul; in contrast to that of Padmasambhava, this, though of gigantic proportions, might correspond anatomically to the shape of a foot.

Gheri approaches the print in order to photograph it, but forgetting for an instant the sanctity of the relic, he climbs up it to get a better focus, and commits, without intending to do so, an unpardonable sacrilege.

The old priests shake their heads murmuring words of disapproval; they are afraid, thinking that the god might take vengeance on them because they had brought us to the sacred place.

What troubles Gheri most is that this involuntary act of his may compromise for the future our photographic efforts in the temples. In Tibet, though there is not yet a postal service, news spreads with amazing rapidity.

Gheri spends the night in great pain; an excessively thin plate of mica somehow or other has lodged in the cornea of his right eye, on the very edge of the pupil. The pain is atrocious, and is only slightly lessened by dropping in cocaine. We are really very worried, for we see no way of extracting it. Tucci would like to try to relieve him from such an affliction, but perhaps not even the practised eye of a doctor could in these conditions perceive a foreign body so small and so transparent. Gheri, after several applications of cocaine, tries many times before the mirror to remove the splinter with the ophthalmic triangle, but every attempt is in vain. He begins to think that if the god initiates his vendetta in this fashion, he himself will certainly come to a bad end.



*27th July, Tashigang.*

Gheresi's eye is still painful, it worries him to have to undertake a march of some length and along a bad road, with one eye bandaged; he will neither be able to superintend the caravan nor to take photographs. For to-day every cinematographic activity is suspended. Whilst Kalil is taking the camp-bed out of Gheresi's tent, he discovers a large scorpion which erects its poisonous nippers in a threatening way. The god Purgyl is not yet appeased.

The caravan sets out, whilst the priests, who have come to the camp to take leave of us, look at Gheresi with smiling satisfaction; they have ascertained that the divine vengeance has fallen only on the real culprit. At midday, across an immense landslide we reach the pass of Tashigang.

We are now above the valley of the Sulej which flows tumultuously and precipitously at the bottom of the abyss; on our right the Spiti throws itself into it with a great clash of waters, having cut for itself a passage along a huge cleft in the rock. We turn round, as if to say farewell to the road we have travelled, as one might take leave of a dear friend; caravan life accustoms one to this love of the road. That long, weary march, that desperate attack and conquest of mountain peaks, those venturesome descents, all give one a feeling of intimate kinship with the country. We recall the various incidents, the horrors and the fascination; civilization makes us the gift of speed but detaches us from this direct contact with nature; the motor carries us onward, almost abducts us, and the country flees from in front of us before we have been able to fix our impressions of it, vanishes swiftly, is lost like a far-off dream.

Whilst we are beginning the descent towards Tas-

higang, there breaks away from the top of the mountain a great landslide which falls with tremendous noise, accompanied by clouds of yellow dust which slowly drift away into the valley; the heaviest masses leap downwards with the roar of thunder to the very vicinity of the few houses of the village, built on an old landslide. Great boulders are scattered everywhere over the poor fields. The perpetual danger from the mountain overhead which is breaking up and slipping down does not worry in the slightest degree these peaceful peasants.

The idea of building a village at such a height, on ground liable to break away completely, half-way up the slope of a barren precipitous mountain, would seem to us to be madness. But these people do not trouble about it. All round the fields they build low walls on which they place slabs of stone which have cut on them various formulas, and in particular the miraculous *mantra* of Avalokiteśvara (*Spyan ras gzigs*, pron. *ken-rezīg*), and live, as they think, secure. It is because the Tibetans do not believe in those clear and precise limits which separate the physical world from the world of the spirit; imponderable bonds unite them. Nature is not a concatenation of mechanical laws, but a complex organism within which there move and operate and intersect conscious forces, to whose capricious will humanity is subject, except in the case of those beings in whom man seems to be deified and who, in this dark troubled world, are able to impose their will on the cosmos; privileged beings, who are in possession of that magic talisman which opens the doors of the psychic underworld of the universe, like that Milaraspa or those miracle-workers, of whom the Tibetans say that they have power to unchain the tempest or check the hailstorm. For them, hurricanes, landslips, avalanches, in a word all

those happenings which make life on the Tibetan plateau so harsh and dangerous, are manifestations of these conscious forces which, invisible and unavoidable for the most part, overshadow us with their dark threats. So where we would construct barriers or would abandon all hope of life, the Tibetans have recourse to the *mantra* and to the magic powers which, by putting us in unison with more powerful cosmic currents, may avert disasters which would seem to us likely to be fatal.

In any case, with less faith in magic formula, but with better judgment, the monastery has been built on a solid rock, between two valleys, safe from all danger.

Kalil with the caravan goes forward to the village in search of a roomy and safe place in which to make camp; we climb to the *gompà*, in which dwells a famous "incarnate".

An old priest receives us very courteously on the terrace of the temple whilst waiting for the *skushok* who has already been advised of our arrival.

We are in an atmosphere of perfect peace and tranquillity which is an invitation to meditation; some sheep are going up and down the steps and wandering without hindrance in the temple; some of the most daring come and eat from our plate the dried apricots which have been offered to us, as is usually done for guests of distinction; even the sparrows which circle round come close up to us without disturbing themselves about our presence. This seems to be one of those hermitages of which the classical literature of India speaks.

Preceded by a servant, the *skushok* climbs slowly up to the temple; he is the first "incarnate" whom Ghersi has ever met, and though he is not a Buddhist and is not convinced about these spiritual transmigrations, he has to agree that here is a man very different from all

other priests whom he has met up till now. He enters the terrace, acknowledges with a slight bend of the head the profound salutations of all the monks present, and with much dignity goes and sits down near Tucci; his dignified dress consists of an ample red tunic and a mantle of the same colour thrown over his shoulders; he wears a small dark cap on his head. He is a man of fine, intelligent bearing, his black eyes full of expression; he speaks slowly and with dignity, without showing the least surprise over our visit, which must have been an unusual event for him. Gherzi goes away to take photographs of the temple and the surroundings, whilst the conversation between Tucci and the "incarnate" grows animated in discussing the problems of religion and mysticism, greatly to the surprise of the old priests who are listening with close attention.

Our "incarnate" is perhaps the religious personality of highest authority in all Northern Kunāvar; and to the monastery of Tashigang is due the penetration of the sect *aBrug pa* throughout the region and in many parts of the border zones of Tibet proper, through which we shall be passing presently.

We have forgotten to add that our *skushok* is married; in Tibet also celibacy is prescribed for monks, but the rule is not strictly enforced for those who belong to the red sect.

Accompanied by the *skushok* himself, we enter the central chapel of the temple; in the half-darkness we note numerous statues of various divinities, but only a few of them possess any interest; most of them have neither iconographic nor artistic value. We know, however, that in this chapel there is preserved an ancient *rukien* (*rus rgyan*), which, according to information we have received, must be of great value; the greatest

difficulty now is to persuade the incarnate one to show it to us. Only after long confabulations does our intelligent Lama from Kaze succeed in obtaining the desired permission. With the utmost precautions the *rukiën* is taken out of a strong box, in which it is jealously guarded. It is a kind of surcoat made of human bones, finely wrought and carved; with the diaphyses of the longest bones, such as the femur and the humerus, there are made the largest plates which serve as a central ornament; with the flat bones, such as those forming the wall of the skull, are made connecting plates in the style of clasps, and finally the smallest of the other bones serve as little balls which, threaded like the beads on a rosary, are used to join together all parts of this grisly garment. On the large pieces are engraved deities of the most esoteric Tantra cycles—*Samvara*, *Heruka*, *Hevajra* surrounded by their following of *Ḍākiṇī*, by *Nairātmyā*, by *Vajravārahī*, by the gods of the cemeteries and by many others symbolizing definite moments in that mystic exaltation which bestows upon the meditator the possession of the absolute. This *rukiën* is specially employed in the ceremony of the (*chöd*) *gcod*, concerning which Tucci has collected an extensive literature.

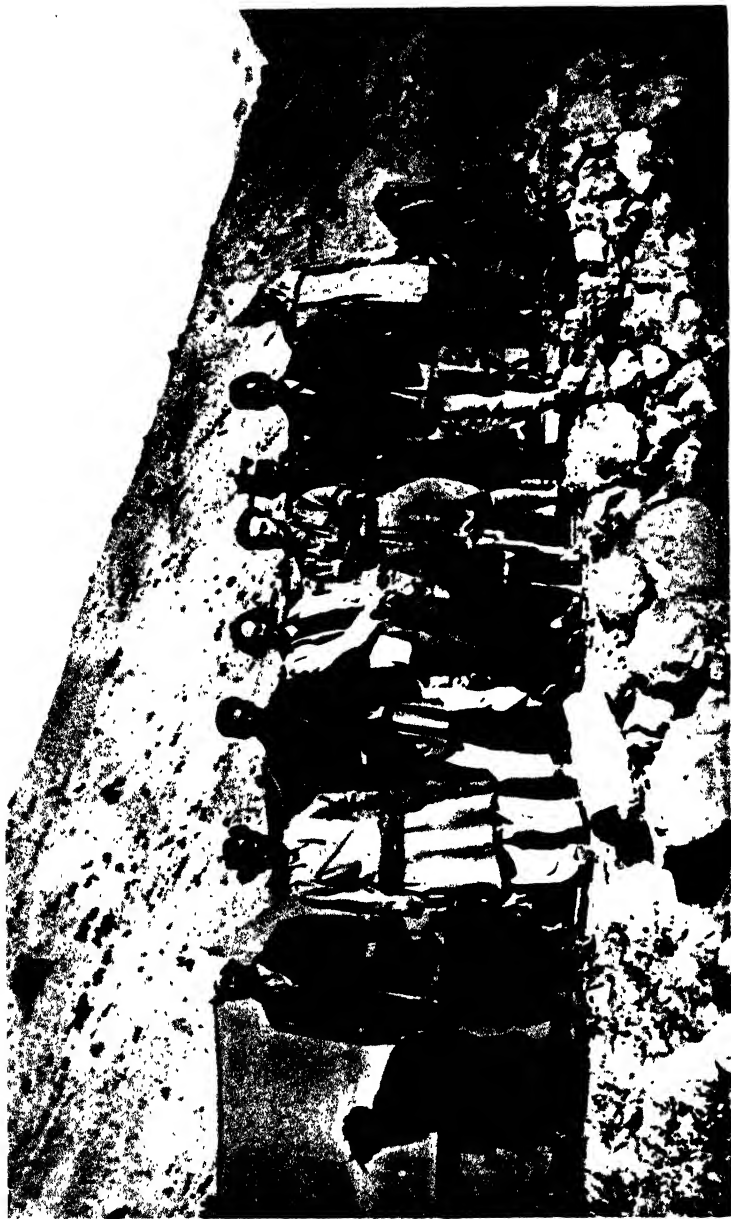
This ceremony is such that the less hardened individuals who undergo it very frequently either fail to carry it through for the number of nights required by the rules, or at the earlier trials lose either their reason or, not rarely, their lives. The initiate must retire to a place where corpses are exposed and which is supposed to be haunted by spirits; he is armed with the magic dagger, with a flute made from a human tibia, with the *kapāla* or skull which serves eventually as a cup, and with the *ḍāmaru*, the ritual drum. Directly he arrives in this fearful solitude he must invoke all the spirits and the



NAKO. THE TEMPLE OF RIN C'EN BZAN PO



NAMGIA



THE "STAFF" OF THE CARAVAN AT NAMGIA

*From left to right. Abdül, Norbu, Kalil, Tucci, Gherst, the Lama, the Lamberdar, Sheekh*

evil forces which in multitudes belong to the mythology and the superstitions of Tibet, and to these he must offer as a sacrifice his own body. It is evident that the novice sets out in a state of mind not very different from that of most of his countrymen. He is filled with the desire to enter one day into the possession of the truth, and the unshakable conviction that this world of phenomena is but an empty show; but, when he begins his exercises, he does so with a mind crowded with all the phantasies which for centuries have filled the religious consciousness of his country. These forces or demons are realities for him; cohorts of the powers of evil, deformed and monstrous of aspect, as Tibetan iconography has succeeded so admirably in reproducing them in the frightful types of the pictured pantheon. The novice, overpowered by terror born of the solitude and the environment, weighed down by the burden of his inherited beliefs, not only will feel crushed and rent by fear, but may easily fall a prey to terrifying hallucinations. Occasionally, however, if he has the strength to persevere, repetition will dissipate all the fears and the mind will regain the calm necessary for the resumption, after these violent experiences, of his meditations. Not only will he learn that even in these surroundings which are so terrifying may he have the tranquillity and serenity desired for reflection and for entrance into the mystic state, but also that all the hideous phantoms are nothing but creations of a brain not yet enlightened. The demons and monsters have no objective existence; they are creatures of our excited mind which custom and meditation will cause to disappear for ever. The ascetic will then be able to extend to other planes of experience the convictions gained through this traditional ordeal, dangerous and perhaps distasteful; the result will be the immediate realization



of the great and difficult verity of the *śūnya*, that is to say the "void"; the void which is not nothingness, but the indistinguishable foundation of the being which is always beyond and above all the infinite number of changeable forms and appearances. The practice of the *chöd*, in fact, belongs to that school which is generally called that of the "rapid way", of the immediate conquest of truth, avoiding the long ascent prescribed by other schools of mysticism.

At the first timid offers to buy the *rukiën*, the Incarnate One almost takes offence; in the first place it would be grave sacrilege to sell one of the most venerated objects belonging to the temple; besides, everything of value in the monastery is catalogued and the list is in the possession of the Mahārāja of Rampur. He offers us instead some silver cups; he is at liberty to sell them because they are his own property; they do not interest us, and in any case the price which he asks is far beyond their real value. Even in business the Incarnate One displays the experience acquired in former lives. We leave to our Lama of Kaze and to Kalil the task of making further attempts to acquire the *rukiën*, which is really important, especially from the iconographic point of view, and which warrants very detailed study.

28th July, Namgia.

The distance between Tashigang and Namgia is short; but the road is so rough, especially below Namgia, that we have to spend nearly six hours in covering the few miles. Directly the old wooden bridge over the Sutlej is crossed, the path is transformed into a long, twisted staircase, hewn out of the rock, and we have to unload the horses which carry the most bulky cases, and help them one by one to mount the high, steep steps. At

one turn in the path the pony which carries the kitchen hits the rock with one of the cases, slips on the edge of the abyss, remains balanced for some seconds, reels, and then, fortunately for itself and for us, finds a point of support. At six o'clock we make our twenty-fifth camp which, for the first time since we left Manāli is at only 3000 metres. Here at Namgia the first part of the expedition ends. In about a month we have traversed the valley of the Chandra, Spiti, and have visited without exception all the monasteries and all the temples; we have photographed their interiors, their frescoes, their statues and their inscriptions, collecting precious scientific material, which not only illustrates in a definite way the religious and political history of the country, but throws great light on aspects of Lamaism which up till now have either been wrongly estimated or totally unknown.

29th July.

Under the command of Abdūl there set out for Poo four horses and several porters with cases containing the material collected in Spiti, to be kept in store till our return in the house of the Zialdar of that village. Amongst the porters there is even the village doctor, who, for want of patients, has condescended to this humble but perhaps more lucrative business of portage, faithfully partnered by his wife. In this district also, as in almost the whole of the sub-Himalaya region, the heaviest tasks fall to the women.

The village<sup>1</sup> is at the height of its activity in the ingathering of the apricots and the barley harvest, the most important agricultural resources of Northern Kunāvar.

<sup>1</sup> The name varies in the inscriptions between the forms: *rnam rgya*, *rnam rgya* (sic), *rnam rgyas*; at present the people favour *Namgyal* (*rnam rgyal*).

The small, extremely sweet apricots are dried in the sun and exported into Tibet and even into India; the barley-meal represents, instead, the principal food of this people who are unbelievably strong, when one thinks of their frugality. There is also a lattice-trained vine imported from Chini which flourishes below the house of the *lamberdâr*; there are fields of buckwheat and a fine walnut tree. The fields are extraordinarily fertile; but their cultivation must entail immense labour, so hard and stony is the soil; and with this climate which is subject to such extremes the place would be a desert, such as exists throughout Tibet, if the people with patient efforts did not distribute, through a system of channels, the water coming down from the hills and from the snow-fields at higher levels, and did not excavate in the rock the little field which spreads out and runs along the edge of the precipices which fall towards the Sutlej.

Even on the high mountain, wherever there is a small level space and a little water, they succeed with infinite pains in winning something from the soil during those few months of summer in which cultivation is possible in such high altitudes.

They call these fields *riscin* (*ri zin*, *ri zin k'a*) "fields on the mountain"; they are not rare in Northern Kunāvar and in the belt surrounding Western Tibet.

The people, especially the women, work hard and cheerfully; from morning till night young and old keep passing along the path close to our camp, carrying on their shoulders roomy baskets heaped with ripe apricots and sheaves of barley. They pass and repass, smiling and alert, as if they do not know what weariness means; they are robust, florid women, bronzed with the sun, possessed of vivacious black eyes; their well kept raven-black hair hangs down in long fine tresses, adorned with

silver clasps inlaid with coral and turquoise. Our Lama of Kaze and the *lamberdār* of Poo, whom we have attached to the caravan, are already busying themselves obtaining permission to visit the principal private chapels in the village and to search amongst the old collections of books for such as are rarer or of higher scientific value. The *lamberdār* of Poo is the son of the *Zialdar*, the highest authority in the province and consequently has plenty of influence here; he knows Tibetan well, reads it, speaks it and writes it fluently; he even knows some words of English learnt from the Moravian missionaries when these had a station in northern Kunāvar.

He is called Devichand; but he is a Buddhist, holding that form of Buddhism which is beginning to get mixed up fast with Hinduism and which prevails in this district. The name itself is a Hindu adaptation of a Tibetan word—*devacèn* (*bDe ba can*) and in a country governed by a Hindu dynasty it has a certain flavour of aristocratic nobility. But his characters are those of the ethnic substratum of Kunāvar; physically, he is not a giant, neither has he perhaps the heart of a lion. Along with some of his relations he holds the contract for the postal service which operates in summer between Chini and Gartok, entrusted to couriers of Poo; he is therefore well known also beyond the frontier and will be able to render us useful service. Perhaps even more so will his friend Tenzin, who follows him faithfully and whom we have called the advocate, from the time when he announced to us, with a certain air of impressive gravity, that he had pleaded in the court of Rampur.

He is intelligent and knows the country perfectly because he has been for several years postal courier between Poo and Gartok.

*30th July.*

We devote the day to organizing the commissariat for the next part of the journey; we re-arrange the baggage and set apart in each case the food required for fifteen days, calculating that the expedition has to last until the 20th November.

*31st July.*

In the morning we visit the house and chapel of the squire of the village, a rich land proprietor, related to the family of the Mahārāja of Rampur. He is a very strange type, who wears on his head as an indication of his illustrious rank, a curious cap, very large, round, of many folds, fastened to his hair by means of pins. He greets us with many smiles, and with evident satisfaction shows us the pictures and statues of his temple, some of them really fine both from the iconographic and the artistic point of view; it is useless to make offers since his social standing prevents him from selling. In the afternoon at our own camp we have the pleasure of a visit from three English climbers, on the way to Nako to attempt the first ascent of Leo-Purgyul, which is more accessible from that side; they are full of enthusiasm and have great hope of succeeding in their enterprise.

With all his heart Gheri expresses the hope that the Purgyul will be kinder to them than it has been to him. So many misfortunes have befallen him, solely because without thinking he had stepped over his footprint at Nako, that he is almost justified in concerning himself about these gentlemen who purpose to enter right into his house.

*1st August.*

The *lamberdār* of Namgia has allowed himself to be persuaded into giving up a beautiful window of hard,

carved wood, very ancient and a classic example of that Himalayan art, now almost completely lost, which shows still how skilful in past times were the workers in these villages.

Floral motives predominate—rosettes, lotus flowers, interlaced tendrils. The columns are covered with scroll-work of stylized climbing plants intermixed with the usual eight favourable symbols—the vase containing holy water, the sea-shell, the wheel of the law, the *śrīvatsa*, the two fishes, the lotus flower, the banner, the umbrella—which, inherited from India, appear with extraordinary frequency on all the sacred and profane objects of Tibet; nor are there lacking the sun and the moon, symbols of profound mystic experiences from which must emanate the fire of the supreme illumination.

According to information received, these works of sculpture in wood were executed at one time by a real school of art at Kanam which now appears to be completely extinct; and in fact the modern productions are little more than rough beams cut and rough-hewn with the axe. We have here the most ancient examples of a Himalayan art which ought to be studied with much greater attention than has hitherto been accorded to it. It has left many remarkable traces in the state of Bashahr, in Saraj, at Kulu, in works which, though they may not attain the delicacy and grace of the Indian models, yet are not wanting in strength and originality, and in their barbaric simplicity are well framed in this harsh country in which they were created.

Less fettered by the laws and traditions of schools, this primitive and spontaneous art reflects to some degree in the apposite character of line and design the simple imagination of the Himalayan races; and, as is natural, its principal source of inspiration is to be sought for in

the boundless forests which cover the slopes of the mountains in this vestibule of the desert land of Tibet, and the luxuriance of which is reproduced, though modified by the trammels of an inevitable conventionalism, on pilasters, arches and windows, wherever there is a bit of space to carve and to vivify with the work of the sculptor's tool.

The house of the *lamberdâr* is very rich in examples of this wood-carving, but the prestige which his family enjoys in the village prevents him from selling to us all the things which we would like to have but which could not be kept secret. However, as even his mouth waters for a little money, we see him arrive here at night with some parcels of books. Amongst other papers there is a copy of the famous treaty between Tibet and the kings of Ladakh of which Francke also speaks.

*2nd August.*

All night we have listened to the doleful sound of the *kanlîn* and the *ḍāmaru* and of hoarse voices raised in prayer; it is the Incarnate of Tashigang, who, after his arrival late last night, has performed we know not what ceremonies of exorcism, because, besides the spiritual benefits in which the people trust there are also decided advantages to the finances of the monastery. He has also brought with him the *rukiên* which we have already seen at Tashigang, and now sends it to us by the hands of the Lama to let us have a better view of it—as the messenger says—that is to say, in other words, to sell it to us. Offers, counter-offers, a coming and going of intermediaries who have to be trustworthy lest the secret should leak out. Finally this fine memorial of Tibetan mysticism and art comes into our possession.

At dawn the whole village, with music of cymbals and



IN THE RAVINE OF SHIPKI





WOMEN OF SHIPKI



BRIDGE OVER THE SUTLEJ NEAR TIAK

drums, escorts the Incarnate One to the outskirts of the village. He, clad in his sacred raiment and bulging with rupees (ours and those of the faithful), ambles along on a pony distributing blessings right and left, *en route* for the next village where another ceremony will bear fruit in similar fashion.

*3rd-4th August, Shipki.*

During our stay in Namgia the Leo-Purgyul has always been covered with clouds, and to-day also, in a passion of anger, it hides its head from men in a mantle of storm-clouds.

Whilst our men are busying themselves in the camp loading the horses, we, about eight o'clock, set out in company with Tenzin, as usual going in advance of the caravan, which we will await in the shade of some rock for our frugal lunch.

After we have gone only two miles from the village, we reach a small stream which descends precipitously in a narrow, savage gorge, and indicates the boundary line between northern Bashahr and Tibet. This is also the point where ends the tolerable road of the Hindustan-Tibet trade route which, as has been remarked, is under the wise control of the English authorities.

A few hundred metres more and the road disappears completely in a very steep-sided ravine, the descent into which is difficult for a man and would seem to be impossible for beasts.

But we are too well aware now of the cleverness of our ponies and we are certain that though it may be at the cost of inevitable delay the caravan will manage to pass. It would be advisable for those who cannot place the same dependence on their men and their animals to take the other road which climbs upwards by way of

the pass of Shipki, whilst the by-path which we are following runs alongside the course of the Sutlej and whilst rising in a toilsome manner always keeps at a lower level than the pass proper. But the gorge is a veritable abyss, bounded by a vertical wall along whose side runs a mere suggestion of a path which looks out over empty space. In Europe people would travel roped together, and here one thinks of making a caravan pass.

At 2 p.m. we are on the pass and two hours later we enter the Tibetan village of Shipki. Tucci is greeted with great rejoicing by the people who knew him in his expedition of 1931, when he fell ill in this very village and was cured by a Lama. In affable conversations with this cheerful and simple people we pass the afternoon whilst waiting for the arrival of the caravan. But the hours pass and we begin to get anxious. The sun sets, and, as happens in these altitudes, the temperature falls almost minute by minute.

The cold begins to make itself felt, the more so because we have not yet dined and are in marching attire consisting only of shirt and shorts. Night has already fallen when we hear in the distance the clatter and slither of iron-shod hoofs above the village. But we are soon disabused of our hope; it is the *lamberdâr* of Poo, who is coming to give us the news that our horses will certainly not arrive this night, because the passage of the gorge of Namgia has been exceedingly difficult.

One horse has fallen headlong, but fortunately the driver who was leading it saved himself, being left on the path holding on to the bridle and head-stall which had slipped from the animal in time. Tucci wraps himself up in the rug which the *lamberdâr* was using as a saddle, whilst Gheresi puts on Tenzin's woollen coat.

Like Tibetan pilgrims, seated round the fire we make a supper of some apricots left over from lunch and a few gooseberries found in a field near-by. Towards 11 p.m. a personal friend of the *lamberdâr* comes and offers us hospitality in his house, and so, like high priests, we are received into the little private chapel. The mistress of the house guides us by passages and stairs to the chapel, where we find some filthy woollen coverlets stretched on an insecure floor made from yaks' dung dried in the sun. But the bitter cold, the weariness, and above all the kindness of our hosts counsel us to accept.

A roll of old cloth serves as a pillow for Tucci, and for Gherzi a small sack of barley flour. The horrible smell of the old rags is only diluted by the stench of the butter-lamps which shine with a wavering reddish light and give improvised animation to the statues of the Buddha and some of his Tantra acolytes represented on the altar.

The night is long and sleepless; a host of small creatures to which we can give no name bite us even through our clothes and raise swellings which itch dreadfully; in vain do we make repeated attempts to identify them with the help of an electric torch.

Dawn brings liberation; but it finds us all covered with swellings and inflammation, sleepy and bad-tempered.

As we are leaving the temple, very cold and wretched, we meet our Lama of Kaze, who has passed the night under a tree and has been reduced to a pitiful condition by the bites and stings of other animals. At last, about 11 a.m. the caravan arrives; they are all very tired and bad-tempered. The head caravan-driver relates how it had taken them about six hours to descend that ravine, how they had had to unload the ponies and carry the cases

by hand and on their shoulders for nearly a mile, and how the horse of which the *lamberdàr* had spoken fell into the gulf with all its load because the path suddenly gave way under it. At midday the camp is complete and in perfect order.

We receive a visit from the Lama who cured Tucci during his expedition of 1931; he is a Mongolian who lives in a retreat above the village. For him life means meditation; he is aware only of his experiences and his ecstasies. All the rest is like a mirage, a dream in which there move phantoms which do not interest him.

Of the world he knows only the mountains and valleys of Tibet, the harsh rocks and the deserts; for him we are pilgrims from a country concerning which he knows neither where it is nor what it is like. We belong to those people who are outsiders, *chlinpà* (*p'yi glin pa*); outsiders geographically and spiritually.

But the Buddhist law about which he converses with Tucci is a medium for understanding; distance in space is conquered by affinity of spirit. We part like brothers and the separation leaves us regretful.

*5th August, Kiuk.*

When we leave the camp at Shipki,<sup>1</sup> the village girls come to say farewell and to offer us flowers, hoping naturally for some annas of *baksheesh*; the compliment is interested, but so kindly and gracious that one cannot but be touched by it. Whilst the caravan is going on to the next camping-place we examine one by one all the dedicatory tablets on the *mani* which in a long line extend almost to the village of Kiuk,<sup>2</sup> and we photograph those of most importance.

Almost opposite us, on the other side of the river,

<sup>1</sup> In the inscriptions: *hri bskyes*.

<sup>2</sup> In the inscriptions: *skyugs*.



IN THE DIRECTION OF TIAK



STUCCO FIGURES  
IN THE TEMPLE  
OF TIAK



perched on a naked rock is Puri, a monastery, founded by *Rin c'en bzan po*, but to-day mostly in ruins. It may be reached from Shipki by crossing a rope bridge or, lengthening the road somewhat, from Tiak. After two hours' march we arrive at the twenty-seventh camp under the gigantic trees of Kiuk, whilst the sky is clouding over and a very fine rain is beginning to fall.

6th August, *Serkung*

The main body of the caravan sets out for Tiak; we, however, together with the Lama of Kaze and Kalil, the tents and the kitchen deviate towards the south, making for Serkung,<sup>1</sup> where, according to information received in Spiti and at Shipki, there ought to be found a temple of the *Lotsāva*, *Rin c'en bzan po*, with frescoes and statues. The same morning we arrive at Serkung and discover that the famous temple is nothing but a little private chapel with fairly old religious furnishings.

It is in the *Lha brañ*, that is to say, in the house of the most important family in the village, which, like a castle, dominates the valley and the few houses which constitute the village.

Evidently the chapel has no connexion with *Rin c'en bzan po*, but must belong to one of his many incarnations. The date we do not know; every tradition appears to be lost.

In the village is a small temple of modest proportions and not very old.

Serkung is not marked on the survey maps.

7th August, *Tiak*.

We descend again along the banks of the river which passes through Serkung until we rejoin the road

<sup>1</sup> In the inscriptions: *Sar Kun*.



along the Sutlej, which we left on setting out from Kiuk. A little way from the junction of the two roads a long low wall covered with the usual invocations to Chenrezig leads to a *chorièn* of great size on which is to be read in large letters—"Homage to the Great Translator". Clearly the translator is *Rin c'en bzañ po*, the most famous person in this province.

It is not improbable that this *chorièn* contains relics of the saint and may commemorate an important incident in his life. We must not forget that we are near the place where he was born.

The road then crosses to the right bank of the river by a narrow bridge of projecting and twisted planks which under our weight sways, dances and cracks in a sinister manner; then it loses itself in a very narrow, broken path which climbs upwards amongst rocks rising vertically above the river. The going becomes difficult and dangerous. We have to unload the horses and transport the baggage on the men's shoulders. It requires several hours of intense fatigue and risk to advance not more than two miles.

Towards evening we arrive at Tiak <sup>1</sup> where we find our caravan already waiting under an orchard of apricot trees. Opposite us, on the other side of the Sutlej, hidden in a little valley, is Radnis, the birthplace of *Rin c'en bzañ po*; we should be greatly delighted to visit the village, but the swollen, violent state of the river hinders us from fording it.

We visit the temple of *Rin c'en bzañ po*, of which there is a record in the biography. Dilapidated, dirty, stripped almost bare of sacred objects, it preserves traces of undoubted antiquity; on the central wall, the only one which remains intact, is a series of divinities in

<sup>1</sup> In the inscriptions: *Ti yag*, *sTi yag*, *Ti ag*.

stucco of noteworthy execution, enclosed in the usual frame with ornamental motives borrowed from the artistic traditions of India, and representing *makara*, *garuḍa* and gods.

The style of the images leaves no doubt whatever that we are confronted with a chapel built in the first years of the Guge dynasty.

The light is feeble and the central cell is closed by a wooden grating which cannot be opened; we succeed, however, in identifying a figure of Avalokiteśvara with the four arms, Ākāśagarbha and Vijayā; also the image of a *siddha* or ascetic which we cannot determine with any greater precision.

On the altar amongst other idols which are insignificant is a good statue in bronze of Padmasambhava with eyes of silver; a beautiful example of the ancient art of Guge. All the other walls have been renewed in more recent times.

The plan of the temple is very remarkable; not rectangular but in the form of a Greek cross. That is to say, it reproduces the diagram of the *maṇḍala*, the consecrated area in which are figured in symbols the mystic experiences of the *mahāyāna*.

Around the temple are many *chortèn* and *mani* bearing inscriptions which we photograph; the *chortèn* without doubt are ancient and very probably go back to the days of the "Great Translator". At Tiak we leave behind the last apricot trees; from this place onwards we shall find no more trees until our return.

8th August, Miang.

On leaving Tiak we abandon the valley of the Sutlej and diverge to the north-east, climbing again by a narrow valley towards Miang, where we will again make camp before crossing the pass of the Shirang. The first part of

the march is delightful; we mount by an excellent road, shady and almost level, along the bank of the river. Every now and then we find springs of the coolest, most limpid water, with which we are able to replace, in our flasks and in the reserve receptacles, the insipid boiled water which we have always been drinking since the beginning of the journey. Some of these springs are sacred because regarded by local tradition as being the abodes of *klu* or of *nāga*, the divinities of the fountains; they are therefore honoured by travellers with strips of coloured cloth and small flags which have written on them prayers or formulas and which are attached to the adjacent trees and bushes. The magnificent spring about two miles from Tiak is that wherein dwelt Jalamati, a deity originally sacred to the Bonpo whose conversion to Buddhism was one of the most signal miracles of *Rin c'en bzan po*, narrated with a wealth of detail in his biography.

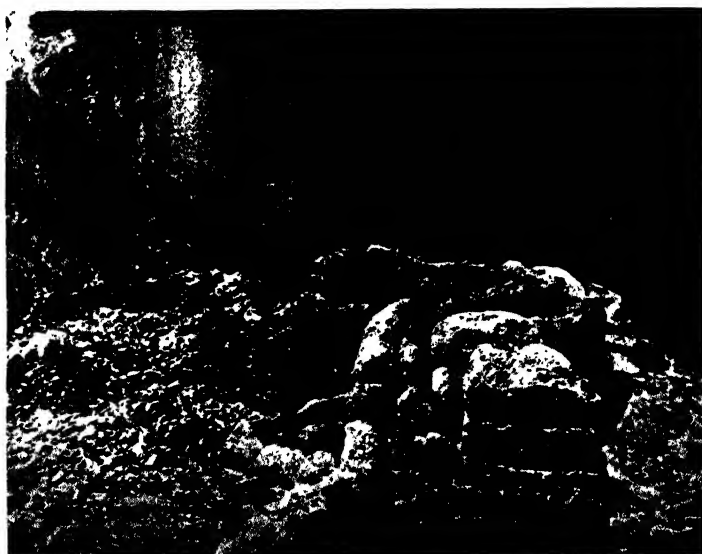
The second part of the march is very tedious; the road winds about in the bed of the river; stretches of pebbles alternate with banks of sand and mud into which the caravan often sinks deeply. At 2 p.m. we make camp in the upper part of Miang.<sup>1</sup> This is a village over which disaster has passed; the few inhabitants are limited to women, children and old men. Three months ago all the robust men were swept away by an avalanche on the pass of the Shirang, whilst they were trying to drag into safety a caravan of Tibetans blocked by the storm. Even now the women bewail the terrible calamity which inflicted on the village enormous material damage.

These poor women work with splendid endurance from dawn till sunset; some tend the fields of barley, some lead the flocks out to the pastures, some gather

<sup>1</sup> In the inscriptions: *Ma yañ*.



A TIBETAN MERCHANT IN THE VALLEY OF MIANG



RUINS OF THE CASTLE OF MIANG



MIANG. HUT FOR FUNERAL CEREMONIES



INTERIOR OF THE HUT WITH THE PREPARATIONS  
FOR THE FUNERAL RITES

firewood for the winter. They also sing occasionally those sad laments which are drawn out into prolonged notes like an echo, and it almost seems as if they enhanced the inconsolable sadness of the scenery. The old men and the children are all on the *dok* (*abrog*).

In Western Tibet the following custom prevails during the summer months. There remain at home only the women and children whilst the male population migrates along with the flocks, the yak, and the horses to the *dok*, vast grassy plateaus at higher levels still than the villages, close to the snowy summits which revive them with the freshness of their breezes, because in summer, in the valleys, even at three and four thousand metres, the sun is strong and the meadows poor in grass. That is why all the villages in Western Tibet, already so poor in population, assume in summer an appearance of absolute abandonment.

The origin of the custom is lost in antiquity. From the biography of *Rin c'en bzai po* we learn that he was born at *K'yuñ ven* which is even to-day the name of the *dok* to which the population of Radnis repair. The people return to their houses in winter, and very often instead of using houses they actually live in caverns like troglodytes, to issue thence and take up a life in tents as soon as the rigours of winter are relaxed.

An old woman who has come to the camp to sell us wood for the kitchen points out to us a distant rock which commands the valley and almost closes it on the north; there, in a dark narrow cave the solitary Lama of the village has shut himself up, to meditate and to expiate the sins which have brought upon the valley the wrath of the gods.

For a year he will live immured in his cell; the faithful will at intervals bring him barley meal and water;

he will speak to no one and will not look on a single living soul—alone with his meditations, his visions and his ecstasies. This ascetic seclusion in the *zamtan* is prolonged in some cases for years and years and may be repeated many times. Novices who desire initiation into the Tantra mysteries cannot obtain from their spiritual teacher the higher initiation unless they show that they possess those psychic and physical gifts which can only be acquired through long meditation and continual practice in such solitary retreats as these. For us Western people it seems almost impossible that a man can remain isolated and often in the most profound darkness, for so long a period, without undergoing serious mental and also physical derangement; but the Tibetans live in another world, spiritual as well as physical.

Life in society is for them almost an abnormal condition; as a consequence these people ask nothing from their surroundings but try to confine their knowledge and their life to their own possibilities and internal forces. Sustained by their religious and mystical convictions, they risk themselves in introspection and practices which excite and develop to perfection faculties and powers which certainly are not prerogatives limited to them; but, amongst ourselves, with our habit of always living in the public eye and never in solitary communion with ourselves, they have no chance of manifesting themselves.

Many of the powers which the Grand Lamas possess, like the extraordinary phenomenon of voluntary hyperpyrexia which enables a man to endure nakedness on snow and ice, the various forms of anæsthesia, the hypnotic and mediumistic phenomena, the extraordinary resistance to the most severe fatigue, are acquired, during meditation, by a long apprenticeship and through complicated control of breathing and certain processes

of auto-hypnotism induced at will. Perhaps there may be some exaggeration in the stories told, but there is no shadow of doubt that many of the Tibetan ascetics can control the forces of our *ego*, physical and psychical, of which we still have very imperfect knowledge.

It is therefore desirable that it should be without preconceptions or prejudices that one begins the study of this mystic and magic literature of Tibet from which psychologists and psycho-analysts will have much to learn.

The sect which prevails in the village is that of *aBrug pa*; there is, however, no temple; only two or three private chapels belonging to the most prosperous families.

This village of Miang is very old, and although to-day it consists only of about twenty houses it must in former days have been of much greater importance. On the spur of the mountain which overlooks it stand the imposing ruins of a castle; this must have given to the village the name of Madsong which I see in the old papers, but which seems to be strange to the present inhabitants. It was a castle built of stone and blocks of clay dried in the sun which used to command the entrance to the valley of Miang. There is no trace of inscriptions; but investigations in a *chortèn* in the middle of the village, made with great care by our Lama, bring to light, besides some manuscripts of mystic character relating to the six laws of Nāropā, a dedicatory folio. This contains historical references to the king of Ladakh, *Señ ge rnam rygal*, who conquered the kingdom of Guge and put an end to the local dynasty, forestalling the annexation of the whole country to Lhasa. According to tradition the castle should be called *Dorgellin* (*rDo rje glin*). The thick walls are built of heavy blocks of mud dried in the sun and all of the same proportions; to give firmer consis-



tency, there is mixed with the mud a quantity of brush-wood. The foundation, however, is made of great stones in the form of a thick mortarless wall; at unequal heights, perhaps to strengthen all the edifice, a band also of stones is embedded in the brick structure.

The antiquity and importance of the village is attested by several prehistoric objects which the people show us and which, after long bargaining, we succeed in buying; some resemble little bronze bells of the type of those discovered by Francke in the sepulchres of Leh which were explored by him and attributed to the Dards; others are like fibulæ decorated with animal motives, rosettes and spirals. The prehistoric archæology of Tibet has not yet been begun; it will be understood, however, how great is the importance of the material which we are collecting. It is difficult to explain to these people what we want; "prehistoric objects" would be for them an incomprehensible phrase; to ask for objects found whilst working in the fields would be useless to us for they would bring us rubbish of every kind, down to the most modern. We have to say that we want things which have fallen from heaven (*t'og ldiñ*, pron. *tonli*); just because of their supposed origin and because of their forms, now strange and unusual, every time they are discovered they are carried off as talismans. The person who finds nine of them not only is considered a fortunate man, but his good fortune is communicated also to the village in which he happens to live.

9th August.

When we are returning from visiting some old *zamcàn* on the right bank of the river, a very strong smell of putrifying flesh leads us, with that attraction which belongs to all gruesome things, towards a grassy

space; close by a ruined chapel we find scattered here and there casually the remains of a female corpse. The head, detached from the body, lies in the very middle of the path; farther on, near a bush, is the trunk with the viscera removed; some metres beyond that the legs and arms. The strange and repulsive spectacle recalls to Gherzi tragic visions of the bodies of dead women, quartered and outraged, seen in the provinces infested by brigands in Central China; in Tibet this is a normal form of burial. The operation of dismemberment is performed by the Lama of the village, who with a large knife amputates the limbs and head of the corpse, then cuts open the abdomen, to hasten the destructive operations of the animals and the birds, summoned together by a triple call of the *kanññ*.

This custom is practised in a large part of Tibet, especially amongst the Dokpa and the nomads, and has been replaced by the rite of incineration only in certain regions. The dismemberment may perhaps be traced to the fear that the spirit of the deceased may return to the body and work evil on the living; the almost complete lack of wood in a great part of Tibet has constituted another great obstacle to the abandonment of this custom even after the introduction of Buddhism.

The woman died eight days ago; to-day they are celebrating the octave (eighth day), and we manage to get an invitation to the ceremony.

Received by the daughter, the few inhabitants of the village assemble, taking up positions round a temporary kind of hut erected in the veranda of the house. A substitute for an altar has been prepared, with offerings and sacred instruments—drum, trumpet, cymbals, little bell, *dāmaru*, sea-shell, the *bum pa* or vase with holy water surmounted by a peacock's feather, and the plate

with the offerings (*torma*), and in the middle of the hut, a great copper cauldron full of *chàng* and a great quantity of *sampà*. As the titular Lama is absent, because, as we have said, he has shut himself up for meditation in the distant *zamcàn*, the ceremony is directed by a layman, who, though not a regular priest, appears to understand the rites; two other laymen help him when necessary. The function begins with the usual music of the cymbals, the frantic tinkling of the bell, and the shaking of the *vajra* (in Tibetan, *rdorje*), symbolic instruments in which the ritualism of Buddhism sees the figured image of certain mystic forces which, during the ceremony, must be evoked; the bell indicates the verity of the "void", that is to say the undifferentiated beginning of all things, and the *vajra* is the *upāya*, that which serves for the complete realization of the same. The priest places on his head the *ringà* (*rigs lña*), a kind of crown made with five pentagons of papier mâché, on which is painted the sacred pentad, that is, the five supreme Buddhas, who symbolize the five germinal centres of cosmic evolution made visible in the heart of the undifferentiated beginning of existence; the ministrant is in this way identified with the beginning almost of existence, with the powers which govern the evolution of the world, and he can command all their forces.

After long and complicated prayers the spirit of the departed is temporarily recalled and made to descend into a rude figure which is supposed to be a portrait of her, modelled in flour and butter; it is invited to take part in the feast and is exhorted not to return amongst the living whilst waiting to be born again in the paradise of *Amitābha*.

When the spirit of the dead woman has been definitely placated the relatives begin to distribute to the company

*chàng* and *sampà*, and the funeral ceremony draws to an end quite lightheartedly. The Tibetans are, when confronted with death, as serene, one might almost say as indifferent, as the Indians.

Death is something to which they do not give an excess of consideration; death, which for us is the end of a reality and the beginning of a mystery, is for them a short hiatus in an indefinite series of existences, a series which unfolds in eternity. After death one begins over again, laden with the experiences of the past which always accompany us in our endless re-incarnations; it is a continuity which has no solution.

We return to the camp at sundown; in the east the blood-red rocks of the Shirang-la illuminated by the sinking sun stand outlined against the Tibetan sky, brilliant in their gleaming reflections.

10th August.

Directly after Miang is left behind the road climbs upward steeply over broken rocks; the horses stumble along painfully in a cloud of yellow dust. Before mid-day we arrive at a wide grassy plain in which the melted snow has given rise to great miry bogs; above us the naked walls of the Shirang. It would still be possible to cross it before sunset, but we decide to camp on this space, since it does not seem that on the other slope we shall find water and pasture for the ponies. Some pilgrims camp near us, and sing with slow modulation the hymn to the Shirang-la, the difficult pass which is always calling for new victims; we get this written down. It is a short poem of great age, in which the last verse contains the name of the author—*Sonàm tobgyè* (*bSod nams Stobs rgyas*). It is beginning to rain. Near us, in the gloomy ravine, lie the unburied bodies of the

caravan-men of Miang, victims fallen in the insidious struggle with the mountain with which the Tibetans are eternally at war; we feel that they deepen the sadness of this sunless hollow.

11th August, Nü.

An arduous ascent to the pass (about 4920 metres); then a steep stony descent carries us into the bed of another river which flows eastwards and according to the maps it ought to be only four miles from the village of Nü.<sup>1</sup> At midday we have travelled more than four miles, ascending and descending from one to another of the valleys which follow in succession like the waves of a tempestuous sea; but of the village not a sign.

On the south and the east pitch-black clouds hide the horizon, and frequent electrical discharges flash between heaven and earth. After another four miles of road we are still in absolutely deserted valleys.

Within the vertical rocks bounding the two sides of the road are numerous caves which seem to have been ancient dwellings; perhaps prehistoric. We do a little excavating with the pickaxe, but the layer of broken rock is so thick that we have to give up all hope of reaching the bottom of it. They are places which ought to be explored with great care and with plenty of time.

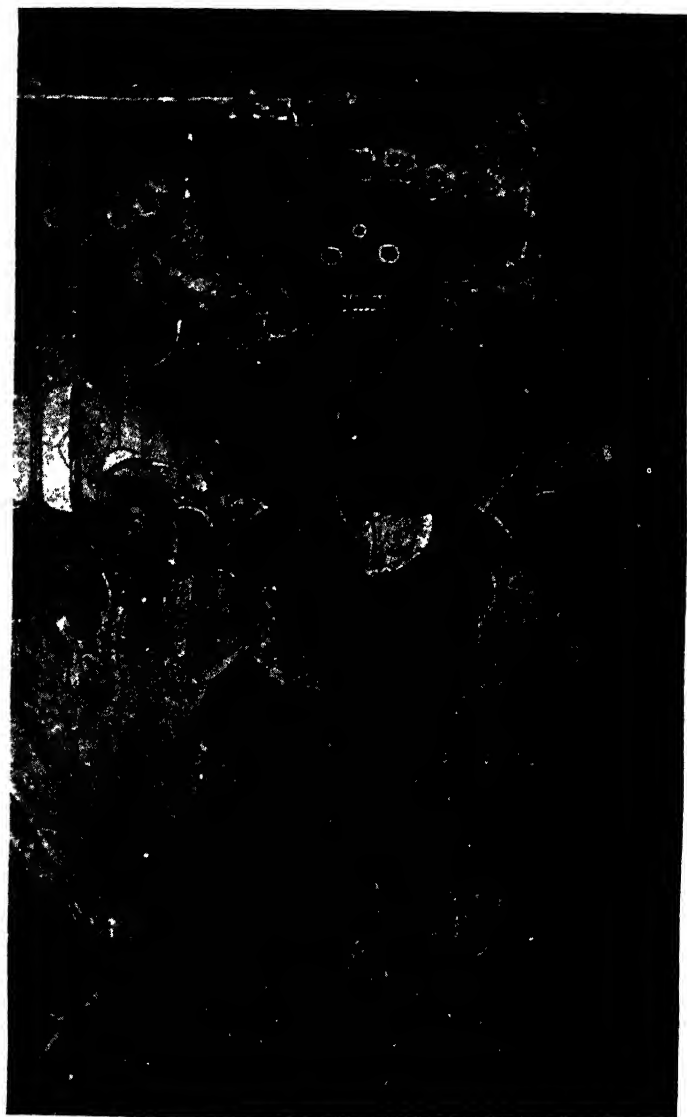
One last pass and here we are at last among the cultivated fields of Nü.

All round us the hail is falling with infernal fury. The air is icy.

12th August.

We remain all day at Nü for the purpose of carrying out archæological research in the ruins of the forts which crown with the fantastic battlements of their crumbling walls the two hills which protect the village.

<sup>1</sup> And not *Nuh* as it is designated in the maps. In other MSS.—*Snu*.



TUTELARY SPIRIT IN A SMALL TEMPLE AT NÜ

*Facing p. 102*



THE TEMPTATION OF THE BUDDHA. FRESCO IN THE TEMPLE OF NÜ

At first the *lamberdâr* of the village, a lame, squint-eyed fellow, had promised to accompany us himself to the nearest ruins; but now, after a long consultation with the priests and the old men of the village, not only does he refuse categorically to follow us to the fort, but even advises us not to persist further in our intentions. Malignant spirits dwell beneath the ruins of the castle, and our sacrilegious excavations might provoke them to take vengeance on the village and on ourselves. This is the true and sole reason for his refusal. Alone therefore, except for some caravan-men, we explore a great area below the fort, where, according to local traditions there should be found ancient tombs of the *Mon*. Long and patient search amongst the rocks and in the fields does not yield great results; we find only a few human bones, not very old, mixed with bones of animals.

There is wanting, however, that which we wish to find—the skull. The Tibetans have, one cannot deny, rather gruesome tastes. And of human bones they make pretty fair use; femurs for the *kanlîn* and for the *rukiên* used in exorcism; the smallest for rosaries; but what they value most is the skull which serves for the making of magic cups or small drums used in the rites for calling up the spirits of the dead.

Local tradition attributes these tombs and the two forts to the *Mon* or, to put it better, to the *Kalmon* (*bskal mon*). We have not been able to get anything more precise; we have had brought to the camp the oldest and most learned man in the village, an *Amchi* or doctor, whose fame has spread throughout all Western Tibet, and we ask him to write down for us the history (*lo rgyus*) of the castles, as he has heard it from his forefathers. But the account is fantastic and childish; evidently the people have completely forgotten their his-



torical traditions; political events, the impoverishment of the country, war, have destroyed every memory of the past. It is as if a curse rested on this country which once rejoiced in such splendours and such glory.

To-day all is ruined and deserted; few houses, wretched fields, decay everywhere. Threatening rocks overhead, naked, harsh, sun-baked; no trees, little water.

In the depths of the valley foams and roars the Sutlej; on the opposite bank, gigantic mountains which drop sheer to the river like cyclopean ramparts. All is fantastic and unreal.

One can understand why this people lives so intensely in its religion, almost entranced and lost in visions unknown to us. The landscape is the natural background for Lamaism, for its rites, for its demons; all is gigantic and mysterious, infinite and sad.

We visit the small temples in the village. There are two of them, and both belong to the sect *dGe lugs pa*.

They say the first is called *Gongcàn* (*Sgon k'an*); the walls are covered with frescoes of moderate value, not very modern, but not very ancient. At the far end of the sacristy there opens a small cell, entrance into which is forbidden because it is the abode of the *yi dam* or tutelary spirit; here the frescoes are executed with rare delicacy and probably belong to the seventeenth century.

The second temple is known by the name of *Gadèn punzòg* (*dGa' ldan p'un ts'ogs*), and in this also the frescoes, painted probably in the early part of the seventeenth century are fairly good. Dark tints prevail, characteristic of the art of Guge, and they are also covered with a clear patina which leaves us ignorant of the process by which it was applied but which, usually, is not found in frescoes later than the seventeenth century. Amongst the many deities which adorn the walls we identify, on the left,

Tārā, Amitāyus, several *Sman bla*, that is to say, gods of medicine; in the centre, Sākyamuni; on the right, Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara with eleven heads, the most frequent symbol of divine compassion, Vairocana.

Under these larger figures runs a frieze which represents in storied panels the legend of the Buddha, the so-called twelve actions, *zepà cugñi (mzad pa bcu gñis)*, or rather the principal moments in his life. It is the traditional Indian version, reproduced on a Tibetan background; the houses, the landscape, the costumes are characteristically Tibetan.

It is almost certain that these frescoes of Nü represent the country as it was when they were executed. The Tibetan painters, whilst respecting most scrupulously the rules of sacred iconography, have employed profound realism in the perspective and in those scenes which they use as a background or as a frame for the central figures.

One panel shows local colour particularly well and in all probability records the founding of the temple; two long lines of people, men on one side and women on the other, are on their knees presenting offerings contained in vases and oil-jars to a divinity whose dimensions are greater than those of the worshippers. This is Jambhala, the god of riches, whom the village community is worshipping with supplications for his favour and his blessing.

13th August, Gumphug.

Whilst the caravan is moving forward to Gumphug,<sup>1</sup> we ourselves go to visit the second fort of Nü, perched like an eagle's nest on the summit of a steep buttress which dominates the valley. As it is at a distance from the village we can carry on our research in peace. The internal structure of the fort is almost exactly similar

<sup>1</sup> According to the MSS., *dGun p'ug*.

to that of the other castle explored yesterday; a corridor running along the central axis leads from the principal entrance into numerous small chambers all identical in size and shape.

The fortress had consisted of three stories: the ground floor, where we have found the remains of kitchens and stables, the first floor allotted most probably as quarters for the soldiers, the second floor in terraces. The pavements were made of dried earth supported on beams with a lattice-work of brushwood. To the right of the principal entrance, a larger structure, perhaps of two stories, must have been the temple; there are still visible traces of pictures and some stucco ornaments. The place is sacred even to-day, as the dwelling of demons and *sa bdag*; small cloth flags (*dar lcog*), stuck on the top of the ruins by the faithful, are fluttering gaily announcing the presence of the god.

Here and there we do some trial digging, but we find nothing beyond fragments of pottery in terra-cotta, with rude ornamentation, and some iron arrows.

This castle too is attributed to the *Mon*. As Dainelli<sup>1</sup> has shown, the Tibetans gave the name "*Mon*" to barbarians, to all who were not Tibetans, and, as an extension, they attributed to them those monuments and ruins of the builders of which every record is now lost.

Two theories are often confused in tradition; of this we have had a proof here at Nü, where the old doctor first of all has assigned the ruins to indefinite prehistoric *Mon*, ancient inhabitants of the region at the beginning of cosmic time, whom he, reproducing a legend already referred to by Young, calls *bskal Mon*, and then he has designated by the generic name of *Mon* the people of Kunu and Bashahr.

<sup>1</sup> "Human Types" in *Spedizione Italiana De Filippi*, Vol. IV, p. 135.



SCENES AT THE FOUNDING OF THE TEMPLE OF NÜ. FRESCO



ILLUMINATED MEDICAL MANUSCRIPTS

These two castles of Nü are built by a different method from that which we have observed at Miang; clay bricks have not been used at all; the thick walls have been built of blocks of stone and pebbles of various sizes superposed without any attempt at smoothing their angles or making them uniform in shape. We have here a type of building which is unusual in these lands, in which great blocks of clay and brushwood are almost solely used; probably they are the remains of a military occupation which is not easy to place unless in the time of the wars with Ladakh or those with Bashahr or rather during the Dogra invasion.

At 11 a.m., after a short march, we rejoin our caravan which has already encamped in the neighbourhood of the old temple of Gumphug.

The place is not marked on the maps; to-day indeed there is no real village, although in a more remote age there was one. There are two houses, a small temple and some very old *chortèn*, in which we find *ts'a ts'a* of great interest. The whole district, its fields standing out as green spots in the miserable stony expanse, belongs to a family of Lamas of the sect *aBrug pa* which enjoys great authority in this region. The father of the present Lama, who died some years ago, seems to have been a man of exceptional learning and with unquestionably mystical descendants. It is said also that the financial position of the family is to-day somewhat worse than in the past, and we therefore foresee the possibility of acquiring a goodly number of books with which it appears still to be well stocked.

In the afternoon we go and visit the old Lama who receives us with great cordiality in the principal chapel of his house, and shows us all his books, his *thañka* and numerous statues of divinities. Some of the latter,

particularly those of a terrifying character, are precious works of art.

The *thangka* also attract our attention, for they represent types totally out of the common; to a greater degree than the Tibetan pictures do they recall those of India, and they bear a close analogy to the frescoes. There is no doubt about the fact that we have here excellent examples of a school indigenous to these provinces, the thorough study of which will be of the greatest interest for the story of Tibetan art. There is no trace of Chinese influence, but rather a direct imitation of the Indian *pata*, that is, of those pictures on cloth which the Tantra schools prescribed as a necessary complement of their ritualism, and the description of which is preserved for us in many works of Buddhistic mysticism.<sup>1</sup> We spend whole hours in examining the manuscripts and woodcuts, some of those of great importance; amongst others two magnificent medical texts with historical paintings and comments.

15th August.

We put off our departure until to-morrow because we wish to visit the old *zamtan*, where this family of priests retires for mystic meditation. We set out in the afternoon whilst it is snowing, and a very fine mist which rises from the valley of the Sutlej envelops us and hides everything. The path winds upwards amongst the rocks and is almost lost in a vast plain; at one bend, the Lama who is guiding us stops suddenly before a mass of rock round which he circles to the right with great reverence.

He tells us that, many years ago, this rock was placed on this spot by a penitent pilgrim who was travel-

<sup>1</sup> The pictures of the school of Guge which we have collected will be reproduced and illustrated, in their artistic and iconographic significations, in one of coming volumes of *Indo-Tibetica*.

ling through Tibet from monastery to monastery and from valley to valley carrying on his shoulders this enormous weight; during the long pilgrimage the shoulders of this singular monk wore away the stone till they left in it that immense impression which inspires so much devotion still in our Lama and in the men who accompany us.

The ascetic to whom this legend refers is the famous Kozampà, most celebrated in the *aBrug pa* schools in Western Tibet; other imprints and relics of his are venerated in the neighbourhood of the monasteries of Hemis and Lahul.

Following an exceedingly narrow track cut in rock falling sheer to the river, we arrive up at the *zamcàn*, which is half cut out in the living rock and half built of large clay bricks. The interior is in the greatest disorder; in the half-darkness we manage to see some stucco statues, painted in bright colours but of little artistic value. Suspended from the walls are numerous *thänka* which may perhaps have once been very beautiful, but are now completely defaced and stained with water. In one corner beside the altar, there is a bookshelf full of dusty books which evidently have not been touched for nobody knows how many years. Not even the owner of the temple can give us any information about them, and he submits, without speaking, to our solemn reproof for the carelessness with which he keeps the sacred books. We need several hours to turn over volumes which are difficult to identify because, in almost all, the first and last pages are missing. After much bargaining we succeed at last in buying in a block the rarest works; amongst others some liturgical texts of the Bonpo sect.



*15th August, Dongbara.*

Early in the morning we set out for the vast plain called Dongbara, about five miles from Gumphug, where at this season a great fair is held in the open air.

About midday we have already climbed up to the plateau, and, for the first time, we meet packs of wolves which slink past furtively and swiftly.

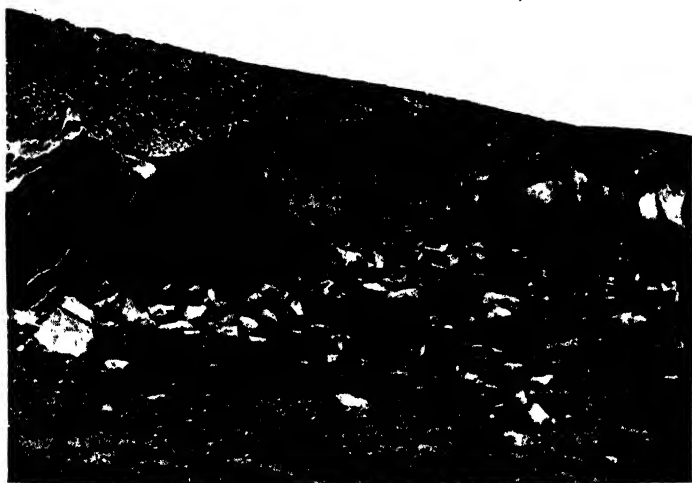
At 2 p.m. we are pitching the tents on the margin of the plain, from which rises the smoke of the small encampments of the merchant caravans assembled here for the fair, which is perhaps the highest in the world (4600 metres). All the mountains round us are covered with snow, and directly the sun has set the temperature in the tents falls rapidly to zero.

*16th August, Luk.*

In the forenoon we visit this strange heterogeneous market; people from all lands, strange costumes, honest people mixed up with thieves and horse-raiders, peaceful Buddhist priests who dispute and bargain with wild-looking nomads.

The Tibetans arrive with their woolly flocks, which are shorn here, and unload the bags of mineral salt which these carry as pack-loads. In a country where grass does not grow and feeding-grounds are widely scattered, flocks become an easy and economical means of transport, for the sheep finds with only slight trouble, as it rambles slowly along, that small amount of shrub-wood which is not wanting even in the deserts. The Tibetans then sell salt and wool, but from the Indian merchants who come from Garhwal and Almora they obtain rice, dried grapes—of which the monks are inordinately fond—cloths, and things made of aluminium.

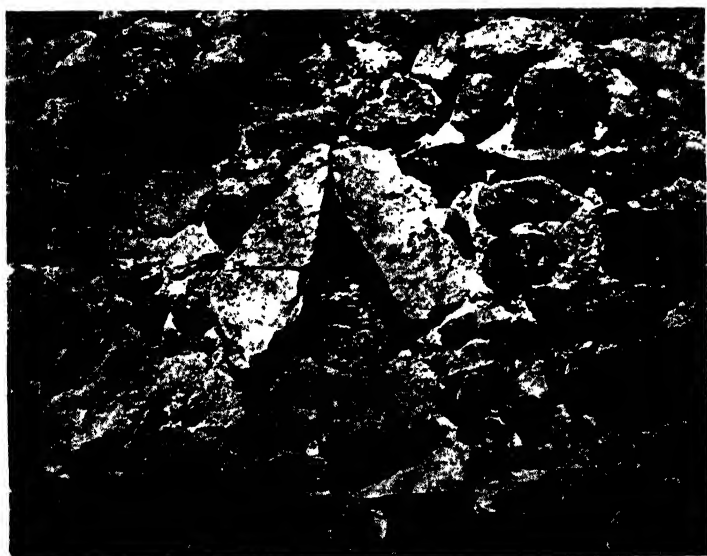
Nor are there wanting some Ladaki who bring dried apricots, and merchants from the state of Bashahr who



MERCHANTS AT DONGBARA



LUK SEEN FROM THE CASTLE



LOOP-HOLES IN THE CASTLE OF LUK

buy salt from the Tibetans for their own use as well as wool which they will afterwards sell again in the great fair at Rampur.

The trade in wool is the most important in these provinces which are just known collectively in India under the name of *Hundesh*, "the land of wool". It is a trade which goes back to remote times and has always been in the hands of the same merchants and caravan people—Kunāvāri and Garhwali, who even in the time of Andrade were carrying on traffic with the kings of Guge, and who now represent the wealthiest and best-furnished nucleus in the fairs of Gartok and Gyanima.

There is a series of fairs during the favourable season in these border countries, and at them are carried out even to-day the principal exchanges with Western Tibet; they begin with those of Kyelang and Patsio in Lahul, then follow those of Dongbara, of Gyanima in Purang and of Gartok, to finish with that of Rampur.

Towards midday we strike camp whilst it is beginning to rain. At 3 p.m. we are crossing the Karum-la in a furious storm of hail which in a short time covers the whole place with white sheets. At 4 p.m. we are settling our thirty-fifth camp in the village of Luk.

17th August.

Luk also is now reduced to a few houses. That it was once a most important city is attested by the extensive ruins of houses and monasteries.

Scattered everywhere are great numbers of very ancient *chortèn*, amongst them some of large dimensions, covered with rough-cast of a bright red colour.

We explore the interiors of them with great caution to avoid raising the suspicions of the few people who inhabit the village, and we find several *ts'a ts'a* of great interest.

The village seems to be abandoned; there are only five or six women in it. Of the men, some are at the *dok*, some at the fair at Dongbara.

The exploration of the ruins of the castle, known also as a castle of the *Mon*, yields nothing noteworthy. It also is built with stonework inserted here and there as in that at Nü, and without a doubt has been built by the same people and in the same epoch; in the thick walls are large triangular loopholes.

The houses always keep the same appearance, and, in general, the same plan as those of Spiti; the foundation part is usually of stone and the walls of clay bricks plastered; a border painted in blue and red surrounds the windows; above is a band in relief which runs all round almost immediately beneath that thick layer of straw or hay or bundles of twigs which, well massed together and compressed, is never absent from the roof of a Tibetan house. There is no trace, however, of carved work on the windows or doors; the village is now too poor.

We visit the monastery. The custodian is absent; but, informed, we know not how, of the arrival of foreigners, he has sent to his wife precise orders not to give us the key of the temple and not to open its doors on any account. Things get complicated. With the men, in one way or another, one always succeeds in coming to an agreement; but it is very difficult to persuade these old Tibetan women who confuse religion with superstition, and who, either for fear of committing sacrilege, or of violating the injunctions of the Lama, or in terror of the vengeance of the *yidam*, are not to be moved from their own ideas even by offering them large sums of money. Fortunately, one of her nephews, a youth who is not so timorous, allows himself to be corrupted by



RECEPTION OF THE BUDDHA



FRESCO IN THE MONASTERY OF LUK. SCENES AT THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE

our rupees and obtains from his aunt the keys of the temple.

We are able then to visit the temple; but we say nothing about photographing. We keep our cameras hidden to avoid raising suspicion. We visit the chapels. The old woman accompanies us herself.

We act like pious people; a rupee before every altar, as is the duty of devout pilgrims; for the benefit of our spiritual welfare we kindle a votive lamp (*mar me*) in honour of the deities. The *gompà* is dependent on that of Toling, and one sees how much better kept it is than the others which we have seen up till now.

The frescoes are really beautiful and generally in excellent preservation, with that clear patina of theirs which gives such relief to the design and the colours; we note on the left *Gonpò ciagsci* (*mGon po p'yag bz'i*), *Amitābha*, *Vairocana* and three gods of medicine. On the right, *Ciagtòn Giantòn* (*P'yag ston spyan ston*) a manifestation of *Avalokiteśvara*, represented, as the name indicates, with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes.

The central wall is all covered with *thangka*, some of enormous proportions, which may be considered as splendid examples of the ancient painting of Guge.

Under the large figures which cover the side walls runs, in a long frieze, the same story of the life of the Buddha which we have already found at Tabo and Nü; the work is very finely executed; profiting by the absence of the old woman we photograph several panels; one which represents the Bodhisattva in the paradise Tushita before coming down to earth to be reincarnated and to reveal his doctrine of liberation; one which reproduces Māyā's dream of the white elephant which entered her side; scenes in the childhood of the Saint of the Sākya; and finally another in which is pictured, accord-



ing to a common custom, the founding of the temple, and in which are represented the personages who were its munificent patrons—monks in the first row, laymen in the second, and women in the third.

The costume of the laymen recalls very distinctly that of the princes of Guge reproduced at Tabo. With the exception of this, however, the scenes conform closely to the Indian style and subjects, and there is lacking that distinctly local note which we have noticed in the pictures at Nü.

The temple belongs now to the sect *dGe lugs pa*; but it is not improbable that in the olden days the sect also of *Sa skya pa* was widely diffused in this district. That would seem to be indicated by the large number of *ts'a ts'a* representing the *Sa skya Paṇ c'en* which we have found in the *chortèn* near our encampment.

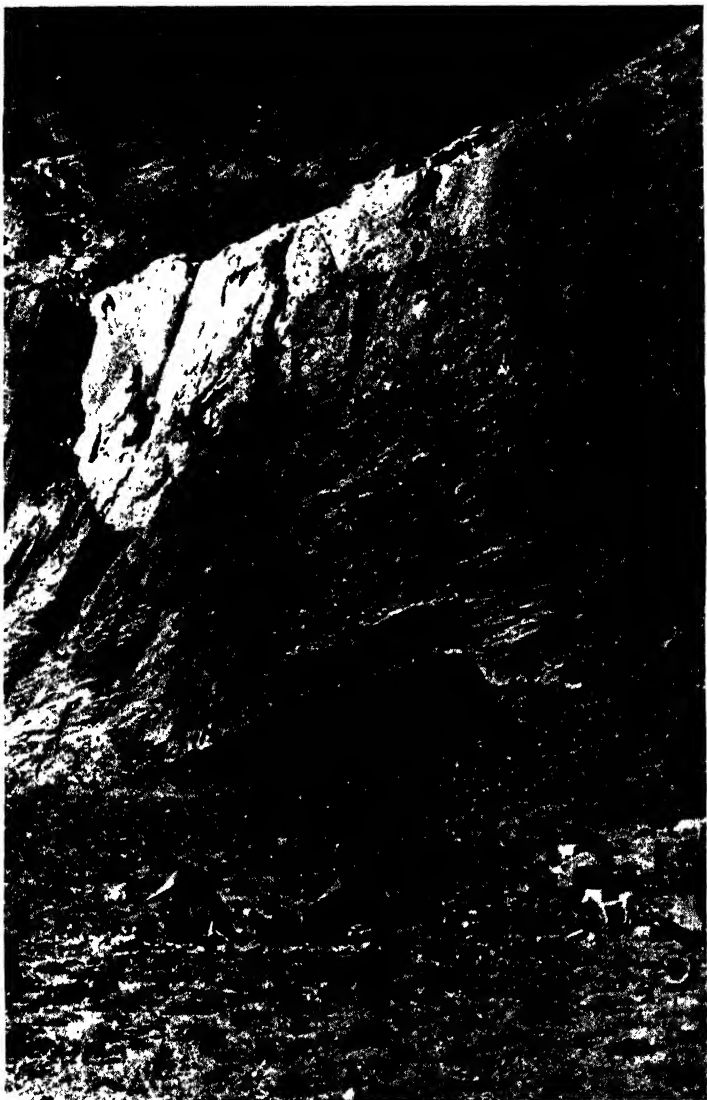
The Hindustan-Tibet trade route proceeds from Luk towards the Op, and then cuts through direct as far as Shangtse; we, however, cannot take this road.

The Op has no bridges and the current is so swift and violent that until late September no caravan is able to cross it; we have therefore to follow the way used by the postmen of Poo who go as far as Gartok; it is longer, but it has the great advantage of passing several monasteries, such as those of Rabgyeling and Sumur, which we are told are of great importance.

It is a fact that the Hindustan-Tibet trade route, marked on the survey map, to-day is almost abandoned for the other which leaves Tiak and, passing through Tanmed, rejoins above Rabgyeling that which we are now taking.

18th August, Op.

After going a few miles beyond Luk we cross the first of the passes and enter the great valley of the river

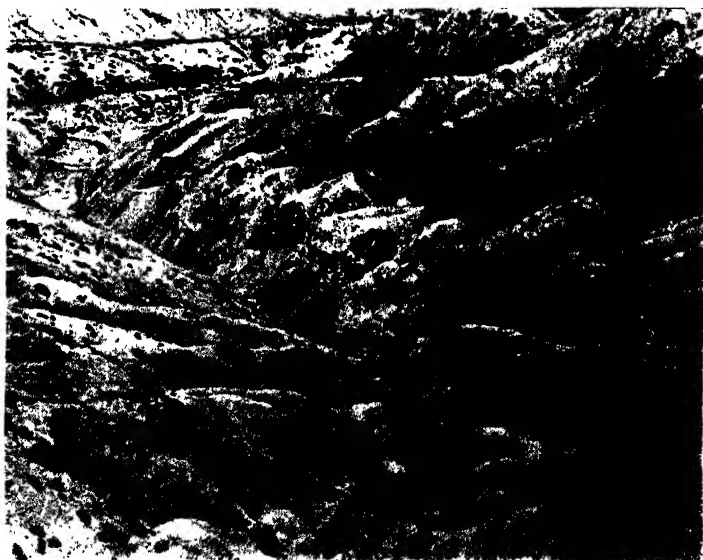


CAMP NEAR THE OP

*Facing p. 114*



THE VALLEY AND PASS OF THE OP



TOWARDS SUMUR

Op, which is a contrast to the wide dusty plain on our right extending away into the distance in yellow, desolate undulations. To-day's road is varied in an awe-inspiring way; precipitous ascents amongst monstrous rocks alternate with sun-scorched plains, immense as a sea, with slopes of powdery sand, narrow gorges, dry, extremely hot valleys, and passes swept by icy winds. The temperature, which is above  $54^{\circ}$  C., and the rarefaction of the air at 4400 metres induce a strange sense of suffocation.

On the extreme horizon the immaculate peaks of the stupendous chain of the Ladakh are outlined against a sky of metallic transparency; the air is of turquoise brilliancy, and seems to drape the gigantic summits with thin veilings.

The Indian Himalayas are already very far away, on the south, an indistinct assemblage of blue and white crests and hollows. All around solitude and silence; one understands how it is that these people feel themselves so close to God.

Water is scarce and we are all thirsty.

By sunset we have travelled more than 22 kilometres; we arrive at a pass, and then down nearly perpendicularly to a space all broken masses and clefts at the foot of a huge vertical precipice. So steep and dark and gigantic is it that when night falls, it is almost terrifying. Near us camp some merchants of Bashahr.

*19th August, Sumur.*

Directly the caravan is ready, we begin the descent towards the Op, which at this point we can cross easily by way of a natural bridge formed as a result of the falling in of the two banks. If nature does not attend to the matter, men, in these lands, take little trouble to make the paths more convenient and secure. To a

greater degree than in any other country in the East, in Tibet people never think of correcting or modifying nature, rather do they adapt themselves to it and submit to it. Obstacles in the outer world are never considered, only those of the inner world; that titanic struggle against nature and her laws in which we western people are engaged is unknown to the Tibetan. Tradition rules; for centuries caravans and shepherds have been passing along these roads; perhaps for centuries more they will continue to pass. Man attacks the mountain in its easiest places, opens a way for himself where nature has already suggested a path, adapts himself to the country in which he lives, and has no desire to modify it by his labour.

We begin the ascent towards the pass of Sumur; we face four miles of very difficult road, steep as a cliff. The ponies stop every moment to recover their breath. Only at midday do we succeed in crossing the pass (about 4900 metres). A short rest for our frugal lunch and then down again through a deserted sun-baked valley; seen through the thick layer of vapour and heated air our caravan in the distance seems quite deformed, like reflections in distorting mirrors. The same phenomenon is repeated in a curious way at the bottom of the valley, when we mistake for a horse a little white dog which is roaming about the fields in front of us; only at a few tens of metres distance do we find out our strange error. We arrive at Sumur at three o'clock. Kalil has already prepared the camp on the banks of the small river which flows slowly below the village. Here for the first time we see some of the wild asses called *kiàn* (*rkyan*) which come, full of curiosity, close up to the tents, perhaps attracted by the presence of our horses; but directly they see a man they flee like the wind. They live in droves on the great grassy tablelands; legend ascribes

them to the cavalcade of Kesar, the hero of Tibetan epic. As our supply of cognac is beginning to run low Gheri employs the hours of rest in constructing an alembic in order to distil that minute quantity of alcohol which can be extracted from *chàng*.

The experiment is marvellously successful.

20th August.

We remain all day at Sumur to give the caravan some rest.

To the sect *dGe lugs pa* which we have seen in the ascendant in Nü and Luk, or at least represented in the temples of these villages, there succeeds at Sumur the *aBrug pa*. There are only two small half-ruined *gompà*—one down below, one up above. In the second there are some manuscripts of mystic and liturgical content, fairly old.

There is not even a Lama, but only an old custodian who after long argument makes up his mind to let us have some books possessing a certain amount of interest and a picture which illustrates the same cycle as is shown on the walls of Chang.

Sumur is a village of six or seven houses; because of the altitude there is no sign of agriculture; the people are wholly pastoral and are now all on the *dok*. The desolation of this land is oppressive; the few houses are built on yellowish sandy hills; more numerous than the houses are the troglodytic caves dug out of the rock.

21st August, *jangtang*.

We leave Sumur early; desert and tropical sun in a lunar landscape.

A road which resembles a tunnel hollowed out in a wilderness of sand; all holes and ditches and canals;

yellowish walls, gigantic towers, frightfully contorted rocks; when we emerge on the tableland, a succession of desert waves as far as the eye can reach, sun-scorched, without grass, without life. Like a road to which there is no end. The shining whiteness of the bones scattered along the ill-defined path reminds us of the unknown tragedies which have overtaken previous caravans. Not a sound: only the slow tramp of men and beasts on the sand.

Suddenly the sunlight grows dimmer; a cold breath which makes us shiver runs through the air; everything seems to become wan, grey, icy. Violet shades steal into the light. For a moment we think that the strange phenomenon is due to modifications, to changes in our vision; then, examining the sun through our smoked spectacles, we perceive that this is the eclipse. It is strange how living in a country so new even in its physical aspects, at these altitudes, along with people whose minds wander amongst visions and beliefs which to us would seem fantastical yet for them are the sole reality in the endless procession of things, almost predisposes us, after long association with it, to succumb to the influence of the environment and to lose that sense of adherence to reality which distinguishes us Western people.

Meanwhile, the light and the temperature continue to decrease. After about twenty minutes we begin to perceive a dark half-moon on the solar disk; it is an almost total eclipse.

Even Tenzin, becoming aware of this celestial phenomenon, suddenly loses his habitual calm, and, as if the end of the world were imminent, prays with a faith which he has never had before in all his life. The world at this moment is in grave danger; Rāhu, the great



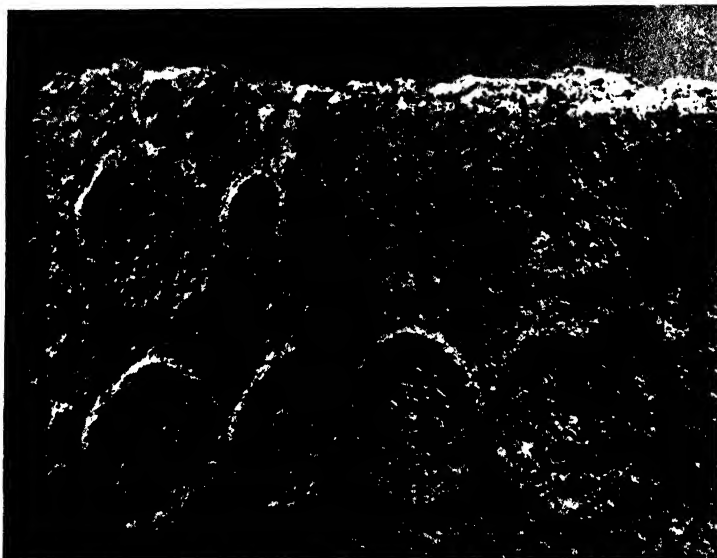
TROGLODYTE DWELLINGS OF JANGTANG



TROGLODYTE GROTTTO OF JANGTANG

*Facing p. 118*





AT CHAGGO. RUINS OF A TEMPLE



THE MONASTERY OF RABGYELING

monster of the sky, is waging battle with the sun that he may devour it.

Tenzin and the other Buddhists beg that we too will hasten to the aid of the sun and discharge our pistols.

Whilst we are firing like crazy people towards the sky, the light is failing so much that we can scarcely see the caravan some hundreds of metres in front; we only hear the voices of the drivers, who also are praying. After about half an hour the sun shines out more ardently than before and in a few minutes the land becomes a Sahara again. Our caravan restores itself to order and resumes the journey amongst the sandy mountains. The configuration of this country is very interesting; it must have been the bed of a lake; in no other way could be explained these hills consisting of a sand whose grains are exceedingly small and of uniform size unmixed with the slightest trace of stones or rock. In the afternoon we enter the valley of Jangtang; we see in the distance our camp made in the solitary green oasis between the two arms of the river, which widens out into many small streams and slows down in swamps; we make a detour towards the south to visit certain very ancient *chortèn* and the ruins of a temple which we see on a hillside.

The valley is less desolate than those we have traversed during these last days; the river which comes down from the north maintains in it great green spaces to which we are by this time unaccustomed.

In some troglodytic abodes dug out of the hill dwells a family of shepherds, who receive us very kindly and give us information about the neighbourhood in which we find ourselves.

That the place has been much more thickly populated in former times than it is to-day is shown by the

ruins which remain and by the long lines of *chortèn* and *mani*. Some *ts'a ts'a*, to judge by the inscriptions in Indian characters which they bear, are amongst the most ancient examples found up till to-day.

Our attention is specially directed to the ruins of a temple in which are still visible traces of the circular rosettes in the middle of which must once have stood statues in stucco, as at Tabo. There remain on the walls the fragments of big beams which supported them. The plan of the temple also carries us back to the sanctuaries of the first period in the kingdom of Guge. All memories of these ruins seem to be lost. The temple is known by the generic name of *Lacàn gogpò* (*Lha k'an gog po*), "the ruined temple"; but the locality is called *Chaggo* (*c'ags sgo*), or, according to others, *Drilciùn* (*Dril c'uñ*). And indeed, *Drilciùn* is recorded in the biography of *Rin c'en bzang po*, as being one of the places where the great *Lotsāva* built one of his chapels, a bulwark so to speak, and a centre of diffusion of the faith preached by him with such zeal.

*22nd August, Rabgyeling.*

We have to delay our departure from Jangtang for about six hours because during the night some bandits have stolen our horses, which had been left loose to feed; fortunately the caravan-men have succeeded in tracing them after a long search, following their trail in the sand. The robbers were quick enough to get away.

We profit by this delay to visit in company with our Lama of Kaze this extraordinary troglodytic village almost entirely constructed in caverns hollowed out in the sandstone rock walls. Of ordinary houses there are just two or three. In the distance the village has the appearance of a beehive; the whole hill is honeycombed,

and often the same habitation has two entrances, one for each slope. Not rarely there may be counted more than six or seven caves placed one above the other, and communicating with one another by means of staircases and internal passages. For countries which are excessively hot in summer and tremendously cold in winter, such a system of cave-dwellings offers the great advantage of a temperature nearly constant.

Besides, the people needed to stay there only in the winter season, because in the favourable months, as we said above, they migrated to the *dok* and lived in tents.

The yellowish rocks, which rise sheer from the valley and from the surface of which look forth the openings of the cave-dwellings, are crowned by majestic ruins of an enormous castle. Local tradition, which we systematically collect in every village, relates that the castle was called *Carpocè* (*mk'ar po c'e*), "the great castle", and assigns it to the time of the struggles with the *Mon*.

At 1 p.m. we are able to resume our march over the sand and the argillaceous mountains. We cross an extensive tableland, dotted only here and there with some spiny, greyish shrub, and then we enter a very narrow gorge, deep and winding, which unexpectedly opens out on the square of the *gompà* of Rabgyeling.

We pitch our thirty-ninth camp on the banks of the river which has the same name as the monastery; the pure, crystalline water introduces a note of gentle gaiety into this landscape, so infinitely sad in its limitless grandeur and in the desolate nakedness of its rocks.

Towards evening there comes to our tents an official of the Tibetan army, who, bringing us the good wishes and greetings of the governor of Shangtzed song, utilizes the occasion to ask politely for our passports.

We reply that there has been granted to us a regular

permit by the English government, which authorizes us to cross the frontier and penetrate as far as Gartok, and that we are surprised that the *Zonpön* (*rDson dpon*) has not been informed of it.

The official raises no objections; he is a magnificent specimen of the robust Tibetan race; he wears a thick coat of rough wool and carries a great cloak of blue wool; inserted in his belt is a heavy dagger in a scabbard of silver; his top-boots are of yak-skin with coloured edges. In his left ear he wears a beautiful ear-ring, a silver circle in the middle of which is set a great turquoise of purest blue.

After a long conversation, in which we explain to him the purposes of our journey and make a great display of our Buddhistic faith, he departs again on horseback for the capital of the province; he carries to the governor a budget in which, in addition to a letter drawn up according to the rules of the Tibetan chancellery, and embellished with the customary expressions of courtesy, we have enclosed, as the usual mark of respect, a modest gift of eleven rupees—an uneven number of course, because an even number would be discourteous and carry bad luck.

Rabgyeling is only a monastery; there is neither village nor houses; in the *gompà* there live besides the *Khampo*, or spiritual head sent from the great monastery of Sakyapa, the administrator, some men, and a fair-sized domestic staff of both sexes.

The monastery belongs to the *Sa skya pa* sect, the same as that of our Lama of Kaze.

23rd August.

Before midday, when the sun is again very hot, Gheresi, after overcoming the first sensation of cold,

succeeds in making several dives into the ice-cold water of the Rabgyeling-chu—transparently blue as that of the sea.

To-day there is perhaps no one in the world bathing at a higher altitude than he (about 4700 metres).

After lunch there descends to the camp the *Chansòd* of the monastery, who, accompanied by two Lamas, brings us the greetings of the *Khampo* and invites us, in his name, to go up to the temple in the afternoon. Towards four o'clock we set out to pay our duty call on the spiritual head of this monastery into which, from Shipki onwards, we have been assured that we should gain no admittance.

The *Chansòd* receives us at the principal door, and through courtyards and corridors accompanies us to the salon where the superior will give us audience.

We enter; the room is so dark that we find difficulty in distinguishing some shadowy figures seated round a table.

There have been prepared for us two small tables with the usual tea-cups, and a soft carpet on which we may sit comfortably with crossed legs.

Here as well as at Ki, the order of precedence is strictly observed; to Tucci the tea is offered in a very fine cup of jade on a saucer of engraved silver with a cover also of silver ornamented with coral; to Gherisi in a silver cup, and to our *lamberdàr* in one of wood.

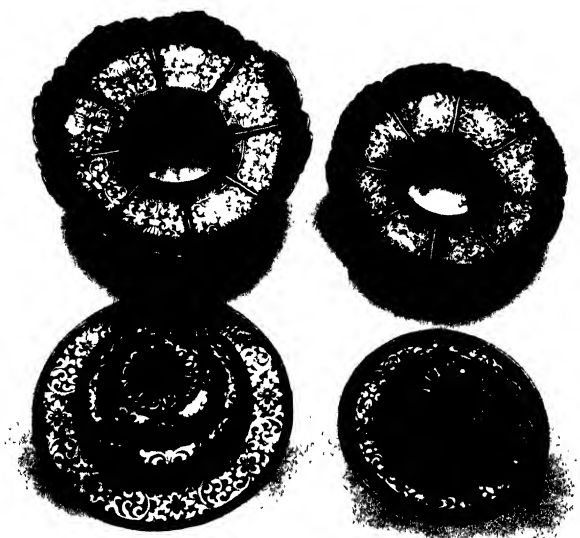
This people, apparently so rude and primitive, who have been able to rise to the supreme heights of philosophic speculation and the highest mystic exaltation, also possess an innately profound and spontaneous sense of art. The Tibetan loves beautiful things; we are not speaking only of his temples and his sacred or cult objects, but also of the small things required for everyday life, which might serve their purpose whether they were beautiful or ugly.

It is enough for them to acquire a little property, and at once they surround themselves with beautiful things; not only in the little temple but also in the house which is never as simple and scantily furnished as in India. Tea is taken either in cups made of wood covered with a thin sheeting of silver, or in cups of Chinese porcelain, or of jade, or of engraved silver.

The cups stand in saucers almost always of beaten silver with floral designs and the eight symbols of good fortune; they are covered, in order that the tea may be kept hot, with lids of the same metal having a beautiful red coral inset in the centre. The tea is served in superb teapots of shining copper, more rarely of brass (like those made in Nubra), round the neck of which there usually runs a band of finely engraved silver.

The spout and the handle often seem to be almost artistic symbols of that double cultural influence in which Tibetan civilization has originated. The spout is derived from the Indian *makara*, the marine monster or aquatic animal so common amongst the ornamental motives of Indian art; the handle is, not rarely, based on the Chinese dragon, just as those wavy reliefs on the band of silver round the neck, which are supposed to symbolize the clouds or the water in which the dragon is swimming, are purely Chinese.

The cups are set out on a magnificent small table of carved wood decorated with floral work, volutes and dragons, in red and gold. The servant retires every now and again with the capacious tea-pots, which the host must always keep full. The superior of the monastery remains seated motionless behind a small table, his hands thrust into the sleeves of his robe in Chinese fashion; he speaks little and in subdued tones, confining himself to inquiring with much dignity whence we have come,

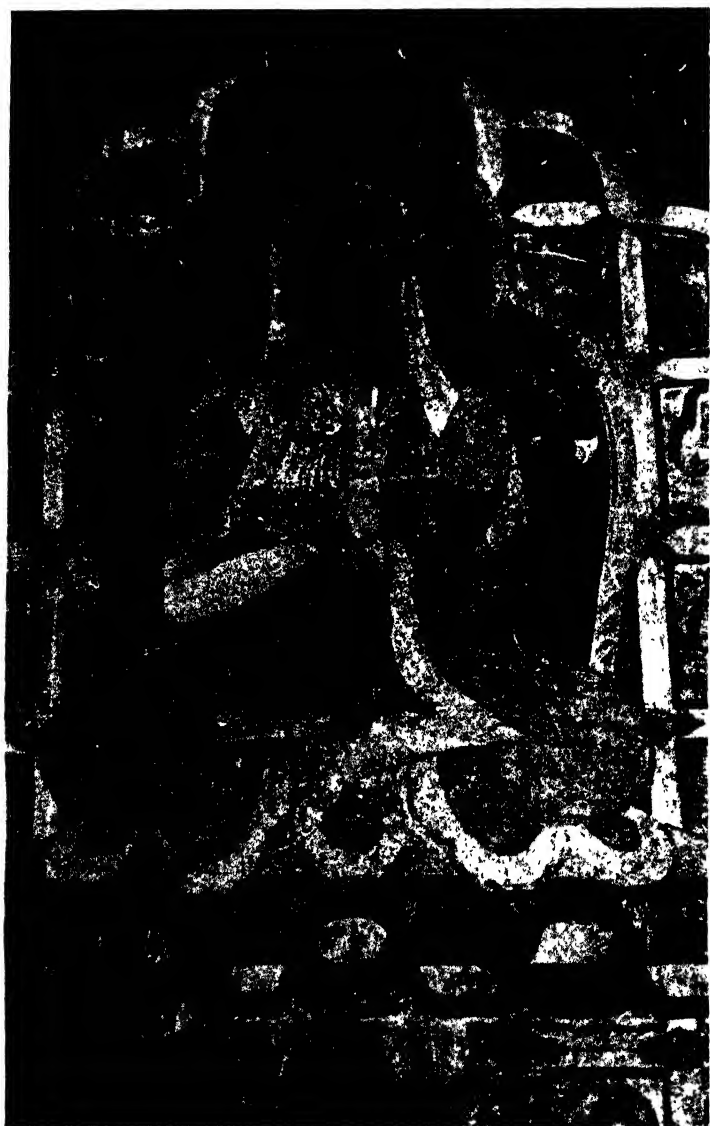


SAUCERS AND COVERS OF ENGRAVED SILVER



TIBETAN TEA-POTS





RABGYELING. SA SKYA PAÑ C'EN

whither we are going, if we have had many difficulties on the journey; and then he entrusts to his secretary and administrator the duty of keeping alive the conversation.

He gives us permission to explore the monastery thoroughly and to photograph what interests us.

We suspect strongly that the dignified reserve of the *Khampo* is a studied pose to avoid all possible discussions. The *Gelugpà*, or followers of the yellow sect, have not a very high opinion of the morality and the doctrine of the monks of this convent, and our thoughts go back to two young girls, half-dressed, whom we met in the monastery kitchen, before being admitted to the presence of the *Khampo*.

We accept with much greater pleasure than usual some dried fruits—apricots from Ladakh, dates, walnuts and grapes; then, having placed on the superior's table a certain heap of silver money, as an act of dutiful homage, we take our leave, and accompanied by the *Chansòd* begin a detailed round of the monastery.

The temples which remain are three. That down below near the apartments of the *Khampo* is not old; it contains, however, a large collection of statues of high artistic value and far from modern; in the library a *Kanghiür* of Derge, the only one issued from the printing-press of this famous monastery of Eastern Tibet which we have met with up till now in this province. Of smaller size than that of Narthang and having the margins painted in red, it is printed on good paper with metal type; it is infinitely clearer and more legible than the editions of Narthang. How much they study or read it we do not know.

We pass on then to the *gTsug lag k'an*, the largest and the oldest, which is still in a fair state of preservation.

The walls are covered with pretty good frescoes of the seventeenth century. Our attention is specially attracted to the pictures which represent the gods of medicine, Vairocana and *Sa skya Pañ c'en*, the founder of the sect to which the monastery belongs. *Thaṅka* and statues everywhere.

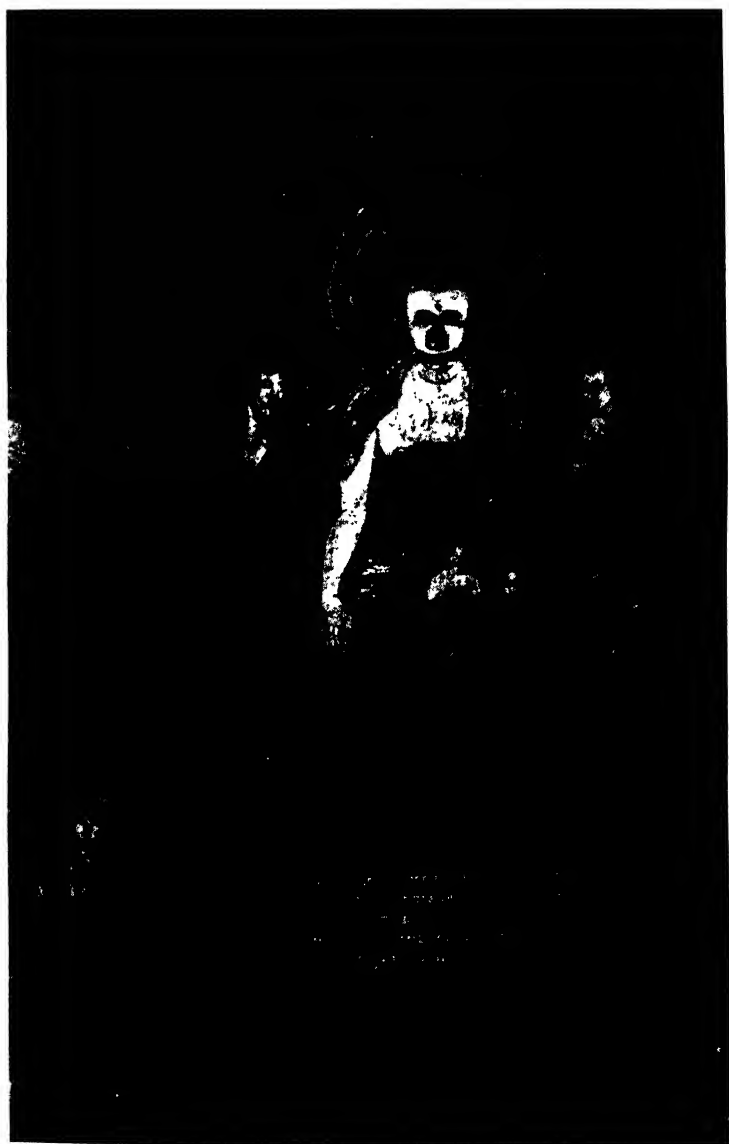
Keeping to the right a long wall, on which runs an interminable line of "prayer-mills", which we piously set turning, we pass through an enclosed veranda on the walls of which are cut in stone and then painted in vivid colours images of deities and famous monks belonging to the sect.

At the top of the slope is the third chapel; it looks like a storehouse, so numerous are the statues, large and small, which have been packed into it. Many are really valuable; some even of silver, brought doubtless from Mongolia and China. This little temple is very ancient; judging from the frescoes which cover the walls it was dedicated to Tantric deities. It seems to be a rule generally followed in Western Tibet, in respect of the large monasteries and the castles built on the hilltops, that the summit should always be presided over by cells dedicated to esoteric deities and reserved probably for ceremonies of initiation.

The small temple is so encumbered with books, statues and other things that we are not able to photograph more than one fresco, that representing *Samvara* (*bDe mc'og*) in the traditional mystic marriage.

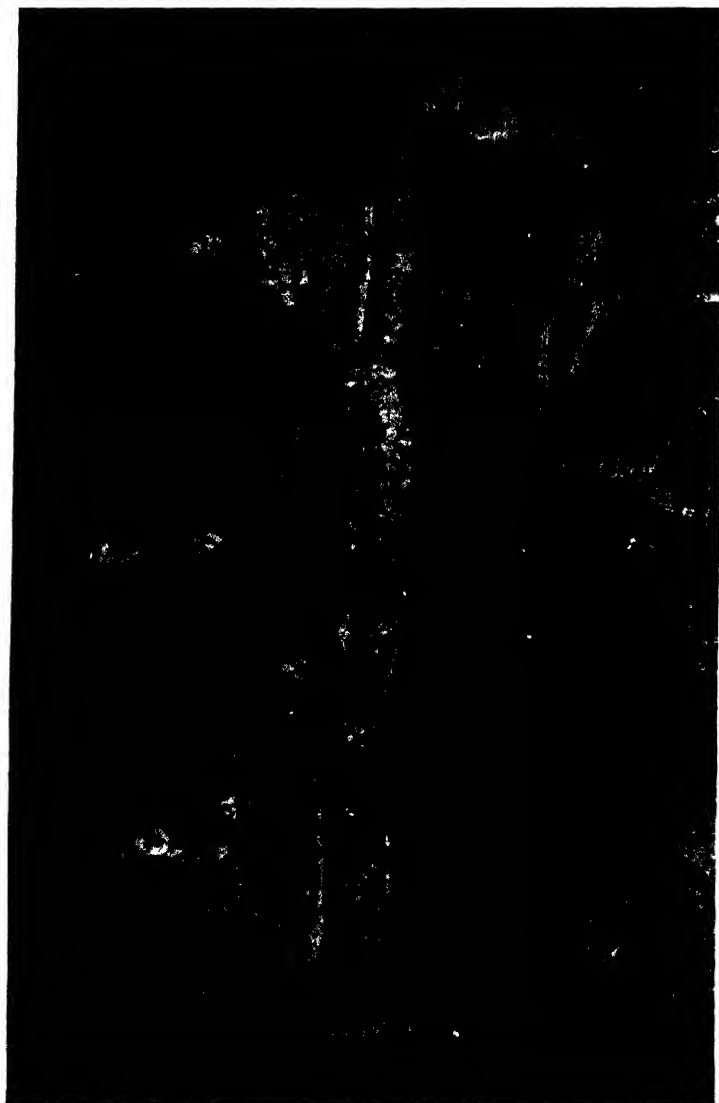
On the veranda of the sacristy we meet a painter (*Lha bris pa*) who is finishing some figures of *dvārapāla*, the guardians whom it is customary to represent by paintings or statues at the entrance to sacred buildings to keep far away from them all evil influences.

Herein lies a danger which threatens most of the



RABGYELING. BUDDHA BETWEEN TWO DISCIPLES

*Facing p. 126*



RABGYELING. SA SKYA PA MASTERS

ancient Tibetan temples: the old pictures, which have deteriorated with age, no longer please. They are therefore covered up with plaster, and the first man who can draw four blobs is invited to leave on them the detestable evidence of his ignorance.

Fortunately the painter whom we meet here seems to have contented himself with painting the veranda; at any rate he is a highly skilled and very intelligent individual. He comes from Lhasa and will have to go as far as the state of Bashahr; hearing of his arrival many villages have already invited him to lend them his services.

Before descending to the camp we take another look at the monastery and the landscape. If it were not for these temples we have visited, we should feel as if we were in a fortress, not a convent—a dismantled fortress which has paid for the resistance offered by its defenders the price of tragic ruin. These monasteries built under royal patronage, perched on hills as guardians of the highways and the beaten tracks, were without doubt the property of the royal family; built as at Ladakh, according to the rules of military architecture, they could, when necessary, be transformed into fortresses.

If what the Portuguese missionaries of Tsaparang tell us is true the kings of Guge must have had to think not only of the foreign invasions of the princes of Garhwal, of Ladakh and of Kunu, but more especially of guarding themselves against revolts of the governors of the provinces into which the state was sub-divided.

The royal monastery was changed into a fort and underwent the vicissitudes and the fate of war; in the event of defeat it was dismantled like a conquered fortress, and it was fortunate if the fury of the soldiery spared and left untouched in a land of co-religionists, only the chapels.

Here at Rabgyeling they have even proposed to improve the water supply eventually, by excavating a very long, deep tunnel which will put the *gompà* in communication with the river down below.

We return to the camp at sunset. On the pearly sky are traced the outlines of the *chortèn* which perpetuate the piety of unknown founders. In front of the tents rises the perpendicular yellow wall of mountains; the world seems as far away as a dream of our youth.

24th August, Serka.

At midday, after a rapid march over easy ground we reach Raksa (not Rakka as in the maps); ruins of a castle and two or three houses; remains of cave-dwellings, many *chortèn*.

Having resumed our journey after a short halt, we arrive on the plain of Serka. Fields of barley re-appear, a poor stunted barley. The children who lead the sheep out to the pasture-land bordering the cultivated terraces stay to keep guard and to give the alarm when the *kiàn* come near. On both sides of the river many *chortèn*; the *ts'a ts'a* which we find are very old, judging from their characters. Some go back to the tenth and eleventh centuries.

On the south-west, on the right bank of the river, there stands on a rugged hilltop the reddish-coloured monastery of Shisa; it also belongs to the sect of the *Sa skya pa*, but we are not able to visit it, because the Lama who has the keys is at Dunkar, between Toling and Gartok.

We are still in a region of abandoned settlements; the numerous ruins which we have met with are a testimony of it. This province is passing through a period of progressive depopulation. Nevertheless, that people

can live in it is shown not only by these traces of ancient inhabitants, but also by the hamlets of Raksa and Serka and their small fields. The river flows almost at surface level, and it would be easy to get water from it for the irrigation of the fields. The phenomenon depends then on a real decrease in the population and on the general impoverishment of the country.

We are still at about 4500 metres.

*25th August, Kyinipuk.*

In another short march we cross a spur of the mountain which divides the valley of the Rabgyeling-chu from the valley of the Trape-chu, and we make camp in the vicinity of Kyinipuk, about ten miles from Shang-tzed-song. Here we return to the Hindustan-Tibet trade route; our itinerary now coincides with that of Young. In the afternoon we climb up to explore the ruins of an old castle. On the left bank of the river we discover numerous cave-dwellings, excavated in the tufa; from the incrustations of smoke on the ceilings of the grottos we learn that they were inhabited for a very long period of time.

We explore all the caves carefully and make our men assist in the investigations; there is a certain amount of risk, for the rock-faces are often almost vertical and there is no trace of a path; the ground crumbles and breaks away.

In one grotto we find thousands of *ts'a ts'a*, some of which take us back to the tenth century; they have stamped on them formulas, inscriptions and images of the most dissimilar deities. It is a real mine of wealth from the iconographic and historic point of view. In another cave, thrown down in a heap, a whole library. Thousands of manuscript folios, the greater part in



ancient spelling; a great number are covered with minute comments interlined, evidence eloquent of the zeal and learning of the ancient religious communities which lived in these villages. A summary examination shows us that in that grotto there had been flung down a complete collection of the *Kanghiür* together with numerous commentaries and doctrinal texts contained in the *Tanghiür* or exegeses compiled by Tibetan doctors. We save from destruction those folios which seem to us most worthy of study.<sup>1</sup>

We ask the people of Kyinipuk for information about the names of these places; they say unanimously that the village, the ruins of which we have explored, was called Trapa (*gra pa*) and in fact the name of it still persists in that of the river—Trape-chu, that is, the river of Trapa. No one, however, can tell us anything about the history and tradition of the place.

Higher up still than the castle, on the extreme apex of the hill, there keep watch over the desolate, abandoned plain the reddish walls of a *Lha k'an*, desecrated and ruinous. Within it, there is nothing now. Even this way has death passed.

Under the ruins of Trapa a road leads to Toling.

To-day the temperature has fluctuated between 35° C. and 9° C. quite four times between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

26th August, Shangtze.

To-day also the march is short; the road runs along the Trape-chu, now on the right, now on the left of the river, which the caravan has to be continually crossing and recrossing. At the bottom of the valley, in front of us, stands the red *gompà* of Shangtze.

<sup>1</sup> In spelling they are similar to those found by Sir Aurel Stein in Central Asia *Innermost Asia*, III, Plate, 132.

More *chortèn* and ruins; cave-dwellings follow each other almost in uninterrupted succession. This valley from Giate to Shangtze must once have been extraordinarily populous—perhaps one of the most thickly populated parts in all Western Tibet.

The frequent recurrence of the word *Sciàng* (*Žaṅ*) in the toponymy of the district makes us suspect that the territory of *Žaṅ Žuṅ*, considered as synonymous with Guge, or according to other sources simply a district of Guge, was actually in the region which we are now traversing.

When we are close to Shangtze other great ruins attract our attention; from the traditions given us and from the inscriptions which we read on an old *mani* we learn that the village was called *Ru kyum*.

We have new evidence of the break-up of this country; that even in ancient times it was thinly populated was known by report—from Portuguese missionaries, for example—and it would have been logical to expect it, considering the inclemency of the weather and the poverty of the soil. But the fact remains that we are here passing through a country where once there was life and now there is a desert. Why the population has decreased in such tremendous proportions we do not know; war and the loss of political liberty under Ladakh in the first place and then under Lhasa might have impoverished the country and almost dried up the founts of life.

Judging by what Andrade says, Guge carried on in his time continual commercial intercourse with India; hence arose its prosperity. The governors sent from Lhasa who have instituted a system by which the people are literally stripped of their possessions, the heavy taxes, the diminution of traffic, are others of the causes which

must have been responsible first of all for the impoverishment and subsequently for the progressive depopulation of the land.

At about 11 a.m. we are making camp. Scarcely is all in order when the same official who visited us at Rabgyeling presents himself, accompanied by two servants who bear the customary complimentary gifts from the prefect—barley meal, milk, hot tea and butter. Mindful of the kindness he had received in the previous camp the official brings as his own personal mark of respect two eggs, which in Tibet represent the rarest food imaginable.

In these parts of the world a fowl is like an elephant with us; people for miles round know where it is. The last fowl we met with was at Namgia.

This officer has had his brought to him from no one knows where that he may make presents of eggs to his governor.

Shangtze-dsong is now visible on the plain; there is the beautiful big house of the governor, fairly clean; round it cluster four or five hovels in which live the people of his suite. The fields are few and wretched.

We are still very high.

Shangtze is the summer capital of the prefecture of Tsaparang; the governor lives here from May till November to escape the heat which at Tsaparang, as at Toling, makes itself felt with extreme intensity. Here we are shielded by the Ladakh; except when the sun is beating down in full strength on the naked rock, one is able to breathe.

It is probable that the governors sent from Lhasa are following, in this double residential plan of theirs, the ancient custom of the kings of Guge. A castle crowns with its ruins the steep hill on the other bank of the

river, exactly in front of our camp; its proportions are immense. It is not one of the usual castles or fortified monasteries like those we have hitherto visited; even local tradition knows it as the royal castle (*rgyal poi mk'ar*).

It is not improbable that, to a certain extent, the administrative division of Western Tibet has been modelled by Lhasa on the ancient provinces of the kingdom of Guge.

At the present day all this immense region which goes under the name of Western Tibet, and which in Tibetan is called *Ngari corsum* (*mña ris cskor gsum*), has its capital at Gar, where the two *Garpon* reside, but it is divided up into four provinces or *zön* (*rdson*), at the head of each a *Zonpon* (*rdson dpon*) or prefect; the province of Tsaparang with the winter capital at Tsaparang and the summer at Shangtze; the province of Rudok; the province of Dava (*Zla ba*) and the province of Purang.

There are besides territories with semi-independent heads, such as the *rupön* of Sarang and that of Chumurti.

The governors are elected by the government at Lhasa for a minimum period of three years, but they may be re-elected, as in the case of the old *Zonpon* of Tsaparang who has held office for six years and is now preparing his caravan to return to Lhasa. The people, whose friendship he has failed to gain, say that he has extorted immense riches from the country; to judge by the herds of yak and sheep which are feeding round here ready for departure, our information would not seem to be at all slanderous.

In the afternoon it is snowing on the Laoche-la and the neighbouring chain; the temperature throughout the valley falls appreciably. In this camp at Shangtze-dsong, because we are completely without wood and brush-

wood, we have to use as fuel the horse-dung furnished to us from the governor's stables; and we do not hide the fact that we are obliged to pay dear for it.

27th August.

We go and pay a visit to the *Zonpön* who receives us very courteously in the most spacious room in his house.

He wears for the occasion the gala attire suited to his rank. He is twenty-six years of age, in appearance and manners a Chinese general; he is kind, courteous, talkative; all the time he is speaking he is telling the beads of his rosary with a mechanical movement of his fingers. He is greatly interested in our journey, in the aims of the expedition and the difficulties which eventually we may have to contend with in our travels. He wants to know how we arrived in India, how many days the journey has lasted, and from what city we come. He accepts with great pleasure the invitation we give him to come and lunch to-morrow in our camp, and before we take our leave he asks us for photographs of our countries.

In the afternoon, to be punctilious in etiquette, we go to pay our respects to the wife of the old governor who is making preparations for their departure. Her husband is abroad finishing up his business.

The *ex-Zonponessa* is no longer young, but quite sprightly, and smartly dressed and, for a Tibetan, unusually clean; her expression very intelligent but perhaps a little hard. The servants who obey her imperious signs do not hide their submissiveness.

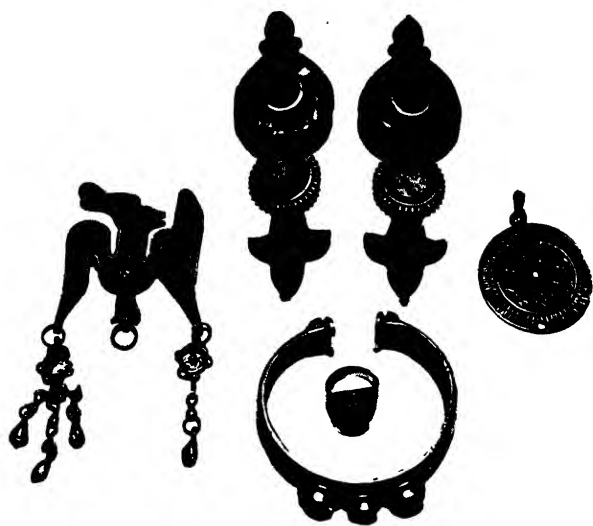
The house is like a great shop; everywhere there are boxes made of wood and yak skin; the booty collected by her husband during seven years of misgovernment is all inside them.



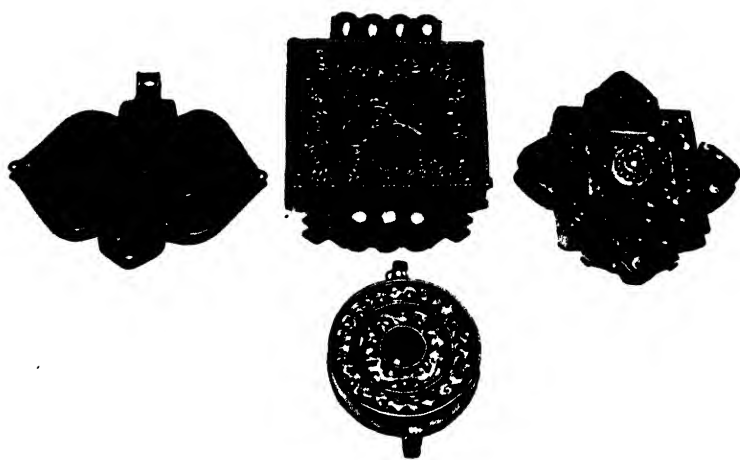
THE GOVERNOR'S HOUSE AT SHANGTZE



THE GOVERNOR OF TSAPARANG



TIBETAN WOMEN'S ORNAMENTS  
DIFFERENT TYPES OF EAR-RINGS, BRACELET, RING



VARIOUS TYPES OF GAÜ

The collar which she wears is magnificent; formed entirely of great corals and turquoises with a superb octagonal *gaù* in the centre; in the middle of the *gaù* a beautiful ruby is set in the most delicate filigree work. Without a doubt it is the most beautiful *gaù* we have seen up till now—a work of Lhasa. It seems that the best jewellers are to be found at Lhasa and Kham; some of the *gaù* which come from their hands are true works of art, having such minute subjects as these wrought in relief—the dragon, the *garuḍa*, clouds, floral motives, the eight signs of good fortune, the seven jewels. They are made in all shapes and sizes; usually they are square or rectangular, but sometimes, especially here in Western Tibet, the design is circular.

When we open them we always find the sacred formula (*dhāraṇī*) in Sanskrit, or, in rare cases, whole chapters of some of the most famous texts of Buddhist mysticism; neither is there any lack of relics.

28th August.

Exactly at midday, accompanied by his servants and his personal guard the governor arrives at our camp dressed in full mandarin's uniform.

Lunch with this high functionary of the State of Tibet, who is more interested in the forks, knives and dishes than in the viands served at the table, furnishes us with huge diversion; he only accepts a little preserved vegetables, some olives in oil, and a glass of cognac; we cannot be sure which is uppermost in his mind—curiosity or suspicion.

He remains with us in friendly conversation till three o'clock. Later he sends us a letter of introduction for the *Khambo* of Toling in which he warmly recommends the European pilgrim and praises his religious



virtues. In exchange for the courtesy we present him with a rapier which he had admired very much during his visit to the camp, and a certain number—uneven, of course—of rupees.

We visit the *Lha k'añ*; it is in charge of a single Lama who, perhaps for some great sin he has committed, has received the order of the *Khampo* of Toling not to leave the precincts of the convent for a whole year.

The road runs through piles of ruins, alongside *mani*, with very ancient *chortèn* on the right. There is nothing here that does not give the impression of decay and death. The cave-dwellings look like empty eye-sockets which watch malignantly the desecrated recesses. The monk who accompanies us is more of a beast than a man. He opens with a certain reluctance the doors of the temple; we are in a royal sacristy condemned like the rest to inevitable ruin. The walls are covered with frescoes of the sixteenth century; we note gigantic figures of the eight gods of medicine, each in his mystic attitude, Amitābha accompanied by his two traditional attendants, *Tsoñ K'a pa*. More than in the central figures, however, we are interested in the details and the ornamentation, which are executed with admirable accuracy and grace.

These frescoes belong to the period of greatest brilliancy in the art of Guge, and represent the point reached in a long tradition, the origins of which go back to those Indian masters whom the first kings of Western Tibet brought into their country.

There are also in these pictures characteristic elements which enable us to speak of an art peculiar to Guge, distinctive in itself and independent of the art movements developed in other parts of Tibet.

In the central cell there is an enormous figure of



MURAL PICTURES IN THE TEMPLE OF SHANGTZE.  
A GOD OF MEDICINE

THE TEMPLE OF SHANG



Vairocana, the traditional symbol of that radiant light of cosmic knowledge from which issue the sensible emanations of the universe, and to the intimate possession of which, having overcome the power of the world of phenomena, Mahāyānic mysticism aspires.

On the altars are statues of all forms and sizes, thrown together confusedly, no longer comforted by those daily offerings which, according to ritual, were their due.

The Lama who accompanies us chews dried apricots, and fails to understand how we can take so much interest in this temple in which he spends with stupid indifference the long hours of his day.

*29th August, Shang.*

Accompanied by the good wishes of all the inhabitants of Shangtze, and especially of the women who are very lavish with their smiles in the hope of the never-failing *baksheesh*, we set out at an early hour, and again climb the Trape-chu towards Shang.

We pass new ruins, in exploring which we find other interesting *ts'a ts'a*; from one inscription we learn that the place was called *Kun lan*. But we find no name of a king. Up till now we have not succeeded in finding on the *mani* a single stone which has preserved for us a record of any king of Guge. The Ladakh invaders in the first place, followed by the Tibetan government, must have effaced absolutely every trace of their predecessors. Fortunately, the dedications in many ancient manuscripts which we have found have furnished us with the records of several.

Shang is a humble village of a few houses; the remains of two castles, one on the fortifications which command the village, the other, of gigantic bulk, on the abrupt and rocky eminence which overhangs the river.

A huge ruin; even now there dominate the confused heaps of fragments and the broken walls certain great *chortèn* which give the impression that they are fighting their last desperate battle against the neglect of men and the violence of tempests.

The chapels are two; they belong to the village, and the keys pass in turns to two or three families of the place.

Desecrated temples; a few pictures disfigured by water; once they must have been as beautiful as those at Shangtze and without a doubt they belong to the same period.

In one corner books upon books are heaped together. One is a complete *Kanghiür*, portions of which, more or less fragmentary, we have come across in our wanderings. This one is written on beautiful large sheets in magnificent characters, in the ancient spelling, the margin embellished in red. Even if they are copies they are centuries old and reproduce originals co-eval with *Rin c'en bzai po* and the first kings of Guge, and they imitate in everything the Indian manuscripts, with the two eyelet-holes in the middle of the sheet through which would pass the cord which held the sheets together.

The enormous quantity of sacred manuscript texts proves many things; not only the piety of the people, but also the learning and the skill of the monks and the copyists. To-day, in Western Tibet, it would probably be impossible to find a single person capable of copying the sacred books in such perfect style and in such accurate orthography. These copies were given to the temples in order to procure religious merit; that is the reason why in the same monastery there may be found several copies of the same text. And at the end there is often written the name of the person who has done the copying

and that of the person who has commissioned him, almost always either for the spiritual welfare of dead relations or for his own particular benefit.

These copies were costly, for monks and clerks had to be paid. Now, even if the people were as devout as they used to be, they would certainly not possess the means to follow the example of their forefathers.

One grieves to see these magnificent documents recording a vanished faith and prosperity thrown together in confusion, piled up in the corner of a desecrated temple, in the recesses of a *chortèn* or in the holes of a troglodytic cave. The fury of the iconoclast has done its work here; hence the dismantled, pillaged temples. Perhaps the tempest beat most violently when Zoravar attempted the conquest of Tibet and encamped at Tirthapuri, where death was awaiting him; whilst Ghulam Khan, as a good Mohammedan, believed that he was on the way to Paradise when he was putting to fire and sword the temples of the infidels.

In the upper chapel are other manuscripts or rather fragments of books and some *thangka* of great interest. It is not difficult to convince the old custodian that to keep sacred objects with execrable carelessness is a much graver sin than to sell them to a person who will hold them in greater respect.

We descend to the camp almost at sunset; a storm is threatening. Under the last rays of a sun which shines wan and ghostly through tempestuous masses of cloud, the mountain, carrying on its edge the fantastic battlements of the ruined castle, gleams white as old ivory; all around, clouds black as night.

A hurricane which tears at and beats upon the tents; to-morrow we must go forth into these storms, always onwards; four days of desert still before we reach Gartok.

30th August.

A day of rest; again we visit the ruins; we copy a long inscription in the second temple and we catalogue the manuscripts found to-day.

31st August.

We begin the ascent towards Laoche-la; the road runs through extensive prairie-land over which race great troops of wild asses. They flee in terror as the caravan passes, but that devil of a Chanku, our Tibetan hound, who, once freed from his chain, has regained all the ferocity and agility of his race, shoots after them like a thunderbolt.

At midday we arrive at a pass where they show us a stone venerated with the utmost piety by Tibetans; they see on it the seal of Padmasambhava and they therefore call the place *Giate*—"the seal". There is a veritable seal cut out on the rock—certainly the work of man.

A little later we establish our forty-fourth camp at 4900 metres on a small level space on the bank of a strong torrent which might be the Trape-chu or one of its tributaries. This evening we are unable to fix our position with certainty, for distances, valleys, rivers are totally at variance with those on our maps, and the information furnished to us by various shepherds whom we have met is contradictory; some say that the Laoche-la is just four miles distant, some, on the other hand, declare that it is still a day's march ahead. Some of our caravan-men are beginning to show symptoms of excessively high blood-pressure accompanied by severe headache. It is very cold; there is a wind and an abundant fall of fine snow.

*1st September.*

We are adopting the practice of the Tibetans and usually making our marches short; considering the altitude, the prolonged fatigue and the nature of the journey we have still to accomplish, we do not want to tire out the caravan needlessly.

After we have crossed a pass we enter a narrow valley which ought to be, according to the maps, that of the River Sumna, in its turn a tributary of the Nenyanggon, which we follow up to its source. At midday we are on the Laoche-la at 5550 metres. There is a storm; many of the caravan-men have mountain-sickness. We begin at once a steep descent into a narrow valley a few hundred metres lower down; from the east blows an icy gale. At one o'clock we make the forty-fifth camp at about 5200 metres, on a little grassy space. It begins to snow. Here, of a truth, one learns what solitude means; a more depressing, more melancholy place one could not conceive of.

If only there were a little of the sunshine which makes one forget so many things and which gives colour and brightness to even the most desolate land. Instead, a tempest rages. The heavens are black, and we have to remain shut up in our tents; one experiences the curious sensation that from now henceforth there is no hope of seeing the sun.

*2nd September.*

The night has been very cold; the temperature even within the tent has fallen to 6° below zero. At dawn we find the camp completely covered with snow; Chanku, who always sleeps in the open, is almost buried under a mass of snow—only his nose sticks out of it. We strike camp in a hurry and get away speedily; the wind raging still in violent and bitterly cold squalls lends wings to



our feet. We cross several level tracts, often fording rivers and brooks; again troops of wild asses, hares, and, on the margins of the snowfields, wild yak.

Of man, not a trace.

In the evening we make the forty-sixth camp at 5300 metres, on the bank of a miserable stream. It is freezing and the wind remains strong; even in the tent the temperature is so low that we have to go to bed with woollen caps on.

*3rd September.*

We continue our march towards the capital of Western Tibet, passing from valley to valley, from ridge to ridge; always we must go on climbing. Before arriving at the last pass Chanku meets a small pack of three wolves and, deaf to our calls, pursues them with savage rage.

We make the forty-seventh camp on the eastern slope of the Ladakh chain, within sight of Gartok, which is visible in the far distance through the haze of the plain. At sundown, towards 6 p.m., the temperature falls, in about half an hour, from 25° above zero to 2° below zero. Before midnight the temperature within the tent is 11° below zero.

*4th September.*

A precipitous descent along the verge of narrow gorges and dried-up torrents, then we emerge in a wide valley which merges into the plain of Gartok; on our left, on yellow, crumbly rock, the ruins of a great castle. The River Gartang divides up here into many branches and widens out into lakelets which at every moment we have to ford by leaping on the croups of our horses. We pass close to the encampment of the *skushok* of Korzod in Rusphu, who is going away on a pilgrimage and also to

trade in Central Tibet. He is accompanied by the family and a large retinue of servants; he wears his long hair knotted on his neck as is usual with *Gomcèn* and those who are meditating on the six laws of Naropa; but the interests of this world occupy him more than the austere observances of his holy teachers.

Here we are, arrived at the extreme eastern limit of our expedition.

An immense plain between 4700 and 4500 metres above sea-level, across which the Gartang, a tributary of the Indus, pursues its slow course; a gigantic corridor between two superb mountain ranges—that of the Ladakh which we have just crossed and that of the Kailāsa which, straight in front of us, launches into the sky its inviolate peaks. Mountains which rise gently in spurs and saddles yellow as gold and whose summits are mantled in eternal snow.

One can understand why the peoples of India and Tibet have made these mountains the abode of their deities.

The first sunset in the capital is of ineffable beauty. Because of the extraordinary transparency of the sky and perhaps because of the reflections from the eternal ice-fields, as the sun goes down, the horizon on the east, behind the Kailāsa, is clearer and more effulgent than the western sky. From both directions great strands of blue rays diverge, to spread out over the sky and meet overhead in the centre of its vault. As night closes in a continuous flow of varying colours moves across this sky of purest pearly-white. Then a darkness almost transparent, lightened by the vivid rays of thousands of stars which are reflected like wavering torches in the waters of the Gartang, which flows placidly, gently murmuring, below our tents.

Every day we have hoisted the flag on our camp, but to-day the ceremony is performed with some solemnity.

We gather together the staff of the caravan, and when the little flag is waving gaily on its pole we all salute it in Roman fashion. A little fold of Italy on the slopes of the Kailāsa; our thoughts travel swiftly to the distant land; since June we have heard nothing of it.

When one speaks of the capital of Western Tibet, as Gartok is, one might picture a large city. Instead of that, there are only two houses, in which live the *Garpōn*,<sup>1</sup> and some huts for the servants; then a certain number, somewhat fluctuating, of tents—great tents of black wool in which the merchants live.

The place itself in which we are is not called Gartok, but simply Gar, like the other village more to the north towards Ladakh. The two Gars are distinguished as Garyarsa and Gargunsa<sup>2</sup>—that is to say, the summer residence, that in which we have our camp, and the winter one, the other. Thus, Garyarsa would be the *dok* of Gargunsa. These names for the two villages are derived from the two seats of the *Garpōn*, who during the winter stay at Gargunsa, which is lower and warmer, and who for the summer, from May till November, transfer themselves here.

The two Gars are therefore the capitals of this immense region of Western Tibet, which Lhasa administers by means of two officials of high rank who, like others, hold office for three years, but who may, as generally happens, be re-instated for a further period of the same duration.

This system of duplicated office corresponds perfectly to the traditional and well-known mistrust inherent

<sup>1</sup> That is, *sGar dpon*.

<sup>2</sup> *sGar dbyar sa*; *sGar dgun sa*.



GARTOK. THE HOISTING OF THE FLAG IN THE CAPITAL



GARTOK. THE VICE-GARPON RETURNS OUR VISIT



THE VICE-GARPON

in Oriental diplomacy. The two governors keep watch on each other, except, of course, when it is a question of extorting money from their subjects, an art in which they are most expert and in which they act in concert.

In ancient times there was here at Gartok a very strong military garrison. Desideri speaks of it, when in 1715 he passed through these villages; it is also recorded in the chronicles of the Dogra war in Western Tibet.

The nearness of the kingdom of Ladakh, then independent, and the incursions of Tartar hordes rendered these precautions necessary; perhaps the ruins which we saw yesterday are those of the ancient fortress. Now there is no suggestion of soldiers, although every able-bodied man, together with his arms and other belongings, is practically at the disposal of the governors. Probably the proximity of the *Pax Britannica* renders useless all military measures.

We go and pay a visit to the *Garpòñ*; although there are two practically equal in authority, one of them is a *primus inter pares* called *Urgugòñ*; the other is called *Urguòg*; but at present the former is alone. The second has not yet come, and it is not known whether he will ever come. In fact, one of the curious characteristics of these high offices is that the *Garpòñ* may send a representative; examples in the administrative history of Western Tibet are not unknown.

In this case the absent *Garpòñ* has had himself represented by his wife, to whom, in accordance with etiquette, we pay our respects next day.

The *Garpòñ* receives us with much courtesy in a large salon on the ground-floor; in one corner we view with admiration a beautiful little wooden shrine all painted in red and gold, which, in a series of spacious niches, contains statuettes and *Gaù*. Many carpets from

Gyantze and a pile of boxes, almost all made of yak skins.

He is a man about fifty years of age, wearing large Chinese spectacles, and a magnificent ear-ring with a pendant of turquoise and gold in his left ear. A sumptuous symposium inspired by tea, and as a gift a very important book which is the guide to Kailāsa and Manasarovar—a manual written specially for the use of pilgrims who come to visit these sacred regions, but full of geographical and historical information of the greatest interest.

Very seldom does either the *Urgu* or the wife of the *Garpōn* issue from their dwellings, but now and again we see them passing to and fro on the spacious veranda and supervising the work of their servants. They have a whole troop of these; for the most part they are now busy collecting firewood for the winter. Every day small caravans of yak go off early in the morning, returning in the evening laden with the branches collected in the ravines of the Ladakh chain. They stack them in great piles which will serve as stocks of fuel in the winter quarters at Gargunsa.

Contacts between the people and the merchants are made by the Vice-Governor, a crafty official of Lhasa who also knows Chinese very well and who is always wandering around inquisitively amongst the merchants and the people who are arriving. It is he who comes to return our official visit, accompanied by the sons of the *Urgu* who are studying to become monks but who, for the time, seem to be on holiday.

*7th September.*

To-day we have presented ourselves to the wife of the absent *Garpōn*; she is an elegant lady, of very aristocratic appearance and above all very vivacious in



GARTOK. A MERCHANT FROM ALMORA WHO WITH  
CLEVER MIMICRY IS CRYING HIS WARES



GARTOK. IN THE TENT OF THE ADMINISTRATOR OF  
THE GARPON





GARTOK. PILGRIMS FROM KHAM

her conversation. She gives us a racy account of her travels with her husband into the different provinces of Tibet and especially of her last and longest journey from Lhasa to Gartok.

She expresses a strong desire to come and have a meal with us, and we give her to understand that on our part there are no difficulties; it will rest with her to make terms with Tibetan etiquette.

Meanwhile Kalil replenishes his stock of eggs; the *Garponessa* has a large supply of them; she has them brought regularly every ten days, together with fresh vegetables and fruit, from Ladakh. But the percentage of musty ones is greater than that of good.

The true importance of Gartok is not confined to its being the capital, but arises as much from its being the most important emporium in Western Tibet.

Although the great fair will not take place until about 25th September, there have already arrived various caravans of merchants from Almora and Garhwal who have set up the large white tents in which they live, sleep, and display all their merchandize.

Merchandize of the most varied kinds: cloths, which constitute the greater part, things made of tin and aluminium, keys, padlocks, *gaû* of white metal made in Japan, fur caps coming from Shanghai, metal cups, sugar, drugs, paint and varnish. With agreeable surprise we read on many pieces of cloth the manufacturer's label—"made in Italy". Up till now there have arrived only Hindu merchants from Almora and Garhwal; those from Kunāvar, with rare exceptions, do not frequent this market; they remain in the various villages where they have regular purveyors from whom they obtain salt and wool. There is no reason why they should come as far as this as they have nothing to sell and they can

get elsewhere the goods they want to import into their villages; and if a few of them do carry on a tiny amount of commerce in small objects of common use, they find it more convenient to market them along the route to caravans and pilgrims and in the small villages through which they pass.

To our great disappointment we have to renounce the idea of meeting the English commercial agent who comes every summer to this plateau to look after the interests of English subjects, whether merchants or pilgrims.

He is at Gyanima, where there is another fair, which precedes that of Gartok by about a month; it is about six or seven days' march from Gartok. We confine ourselves to sending him a letter of greeting in which we inform him of our programme and beg that, if possible, he too will say a word in our favour to the *Khampo* of Toling.

*8th September.*

On the eighth there arrives at Gartok from Khams a very famous Lama who is on the way to Gargunsa, to go into retreat for meditation in one of its *zamcàn*.<sup>1</sup> The *Garpòñ* profits by his coming to entertain him with great honour and to have performed for his benefit special ceremonies which keep them occupied together for almost all hours of the day and night. The harsh sound of the *kanlñ*, the jingling of the bell, the lugubrious uproar of the magic drum shatter the silence of this infinite solitude.

The Lama is a celebrated ascetic of the sect of the *rDsogs c'en*, the "Perfect Ones", who have retained striking Bonpo survivals, and who recognize as their greatest teachers *Padmasambhava* and *kLoñ c'en*.

<sup>1</sup> v. above, p. 60.

He is the favourite disciple of the famous *Palden devaghiazò* (*dPal ldan bDe ba rgya mts'o*) who died some years ago at Purang, venerated by all as a *Dutòb* (*agrub t'òb*), and a companion of the other famous Lama *Namcà Gimè dorgè* (*Nam mk'a' ajigs med rdo rje*) whom Tucci met at Lippa on his journey in 1931 and who still lives there.

We have succeeded in establishing a friendship with the Lama of Khams. He is called *Nagcenghellòn* (*Nag c'en dge sloñ*); people say that he has attained rare perfection and possesses miraculous powers.

Squatting on the ground together we talk of the mysticism of Buddhism, here on this boundless plain which, on the extreme horizon, towards Ladakh, seems to mingle with the sky.

In these solitudes the world seems to be a far-off dream, as if the magic of some Lama had transported us into other spheres; one of the rare moments in which our "ego" appears to be almost freed from the bonds of the realities which surround us.

When he perceives that one of us is able to follow him in these his confessions and revelations of experiences, he leads us through unexplored regions of mystic realizations, through these abysmal worlds of our existence in which there move, often confused and contradictory, powerful forces which, although they do not always manifest themselves in the bright light of knowledge, yet constitute the foundation of our individuality; he explains to us systems of dominion and government which, linking the physical world with the psychical world—according to Indo-Tibetan tradition—accomplish mystic regeneration. And he shows us how in practice we can turn into realities those ideals of which one of us has read so much in the old Tibetan manuscripts,

which without a key would remain enigmatic writings and strange symbols.

And in the end he would like to confer on us spiritual investiture, in order that we might go with him, as every good disciple does, to meditate under his guidance, for twelve years, in some grotto in Tibet.

This figure brings us back very suddenly to the reality of things. The Tibetans, like most Orientals, have no conception of time, do not know what this tyrant is, the inevitable passage of one hour into another towards that instant when we shall no longer be able to reckon.

But when humanity is divided into these two great sections—one which denies and the other which affirms, one which acts and the other which meditates, and both are full of life and translating their visions into action, what other guide can we have in choosing whether to follow one way rather than the other if not the instinctive, unreasoning voice of that spiritual entity by which we have been formed? The ascetic journeys off alone to his Tibetan hermitage, and we go to re-arrange the caravan for the resumption of our return journey.

*9th-13th September.*

Days of forced delay. The two men have not yet returned whom we sent from Namgia to Rampur to request the bank to telegraph more money, to take charge of it and consign it to us; what we have is nearly finished; and in these places they accept nothing but silver; in all Spiti and Tibet, he who carries with him only paper money may die of hunger.

Superb though the landscape is, this long wait in the end grows wearisome. Even the caravan people are bored, and try to kill time by pursuing the great fishes which glide through the waters of the Gartang, keeping

their doings secret lest they should offend the religious scruples of the Tibetans.

The cook improvises a dish of these fish and gives it to us for dinner; but it is so mucilaginous and full of bones that we cannot eat it.

We become friendly with the whole population of Gartok, we know their secrets, their intrigues, their maladies. The administrator of the old Urgu often sees us coming into his large, well-furnished tent, where all the men of Gartok are in the habit of gathering together to pass the time drinking *chàng* and playing at dice. His friendship procures for us many important things; a beautiful collection of prehistoric objects and an illuminated manuscript which contains songs in honour of the supreme masters *bKa'rgyud pa*, with musical notation.

In this tranquil, idle life, the arrival of a caravan or even of a few new people constitutes a great event; and then, carried on the back of one of our men, we ford the river which separates us from the community and at once set about investigating, talking, observing; to-day it is a Mohammedan merchant from Ladakh, who is going to Lhasa and is stopping here some days whilst waiting for the main body of the caravan; he speaks to us of his journeys and his experiences with the majestic air which rich Mohammedans know how to assume; now they are magicians from Khams, now *Sa skya pa* monks who are travelling round with a great decree from their head for the purpose of collecting funds and gifts for the monastery; then nomads who come no man knows whence and who go no man knows whither; and people from Purang who are selling cups and little drums made of wood.

There is also a small, very modern temple; it belongs to the *dGelugs pa* sect, and is under the supreme juris-

diction of Toling. There is only one old monk who passes almost every hour of the day in it chanting psalms.

In the spacious courtyard certain groups of the servants are preparing heavy belts of yak leather; the only industry—if such it can be called—of which we have seen any sign in this strange village.

We also collect precise information about the roads to Toling; there are two of them—that which crosses the Ayi-la, and passes the *Sa skya pa* monastery of Dunkar, or that of the Bogo-la, which was followed by Young. We decide on the latter because, though it is the higher, it is shorter and less trying. The few caravans bound for Toling all go by the Bogo-la.

14th September.

This morning there have arrived the men who bring the rupees; we see them appear on the extreme horizon with two limping asses which halt at every step. And let it be added that at Namgia we have enjoined them to rejoin us in the speediest manner possible.

To recover time we order the departure for midday; two horses are missing which the drivers fear are swallowed up in the muddy swamps of the Gartang.

Again we traverse the whole plain, fording many times and with various incidents the numerous ramifications of the Gartang, and we begin the ascent of a narrow nameless valley which leads to the Bogo-la. In the evening we camp on the bank of the river at about 4650 metres.

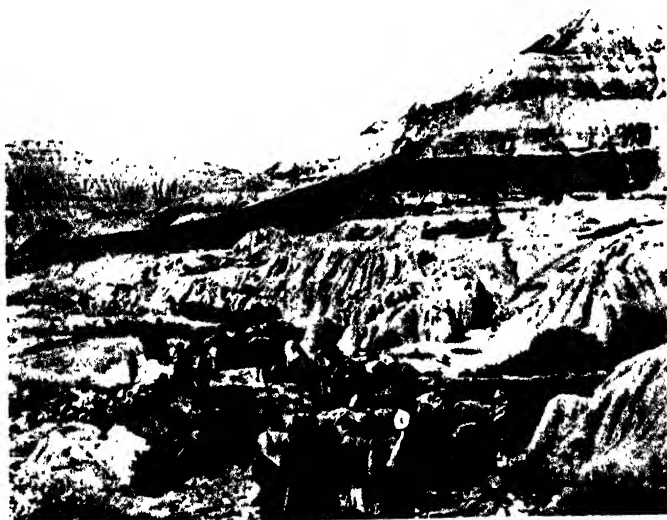
15th September.

By means of a rather long march we arrive close to the snow, where we make camp at about 5300 metres.

This valley is terribly wild and mournful; through the haze of the evening we see passing, at about a hundred metres from our camp, a number of wolves, yellow,

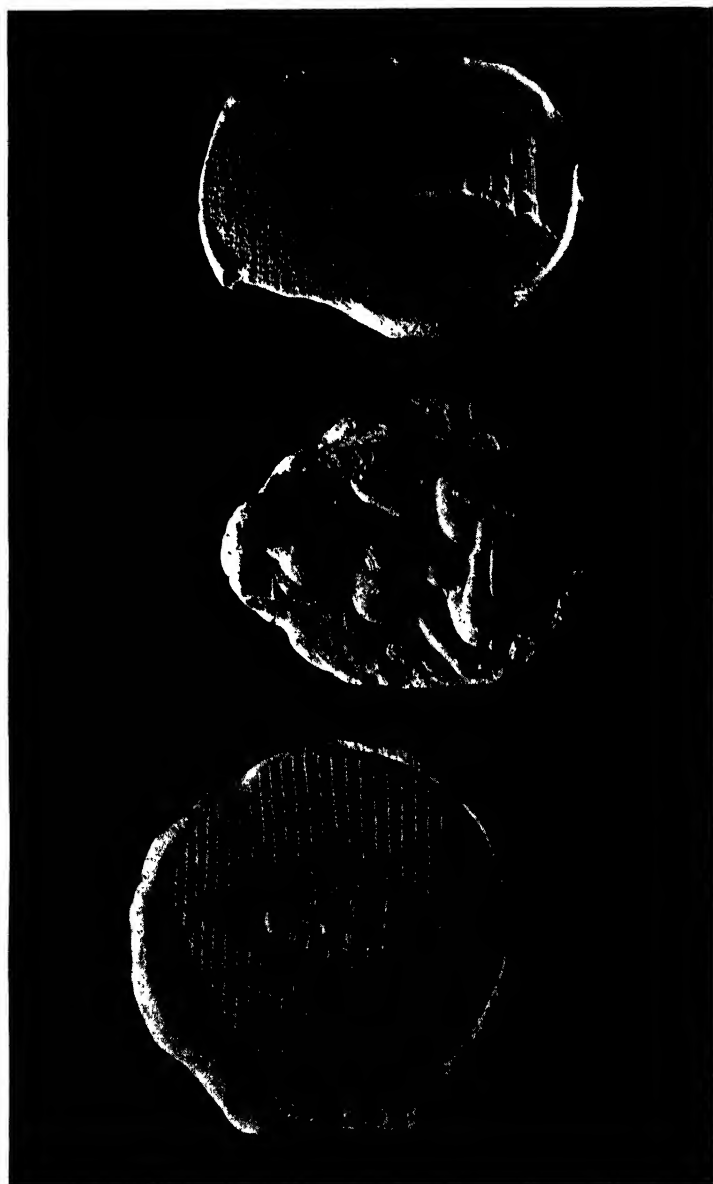


ON THE SLOPES OF THE BOGO-LA. TUCCI AND GHERSI



IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF DONGBO





TS'A TS'A FOUND AT DRINSA

hungry-looking creatures; they slink furtively up towards the pass, perhaps attracted by our caravan. Many wild yak are wandering over the snow-fields. Immediately after sunset it begins to snow heavily and in a short time everything is white. In the interior of the hermetically closed tent we celebrate our fiftieth camp, drinking to our mutual health in an extra glass of distilled *chàng*.

*16th September.*

Before midday we succeed in crossing the Bogola, one of the highest in this part of the Himalayas (about 5900 metres). Towards the summit more snow, in climbing across which the caravan experiences great difficulty; but in spite of the icy wind and the ordeal in front of us, we stay for a long time to admire one of the most beautiful panoramas we have ever seen. In the east, now very far distant, the chain of the Kailāsa almost blotted out by storm-clouds; to the south of the pass, between us and the undulations of the Indian Himalayas, a yellowish sea of hills and plains on which water has carved out fantastic mazes.

By degrees as we descend towards the lower levels the fatigue diminishes, we breathe better and we walk more briskly. At 4800 metres, where we make camp in the evening, the air already seems heavy, as it is when one comes down rapidly from a mountain to sea level. At seven we are in bed; outside it is beginning to snow.

*17th September, Dongbo.*

A quick march along the river. At one o'clock we are already encamped in the little village of Dongbo, where at last we again see a few trees and fields of barley and millet.

This vegetation, though poor and scanty, tells us we have reached low levels.

The village of Dongbo is practically a fief of the monastery of Toling; the place is very old; on the hills which overlook it, remains of temples and *chortèn*. The women repeat in this village a custom which we do not remember to have met with since we left Spiti. Directly they see us coming in the distance, they extend a piece of material from their dress across the path by which we must pass, and hang from it some ears of barley; it is intended as a respectful welcome and politely calls for a generous response on the part of the stranger.

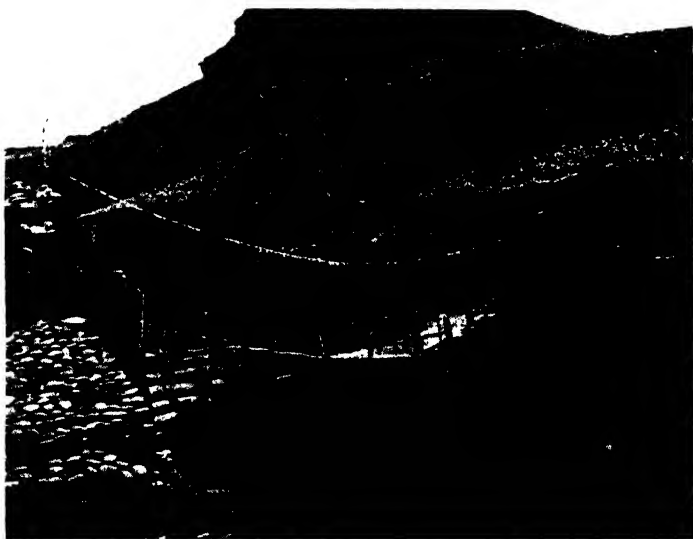
We notice also the ear-rings of these women; they are of a type completely different from that hitherto met with; circular rosettes with a coral inset in the centre and filigree work all round it.

18th September, Toling.

We leave for Toling. On the right of the road, on the slope of a hill, the ruins of a gigantic castle.

The ground becomes more and more broken up; we enter a great valley where the remains of ancient buildings stand out white on the landscape. The guide informs us that the name of this place is Drinsa; it is now completely depopulated. But the temple is built on the same plan as the oldest chapels of Guge; exploration of the *chortèn* fully confirms our expectations; the *ts'a ts'a* which are preserved in them are perhaps the most ancient that we have found up till now. The road mounts upwards over an argillaceous rock so steep that it is a marvel how the horses manage to climb it; then it disappears in a natural tunnel so narrow that every moment the baggage is banging against its side walls.

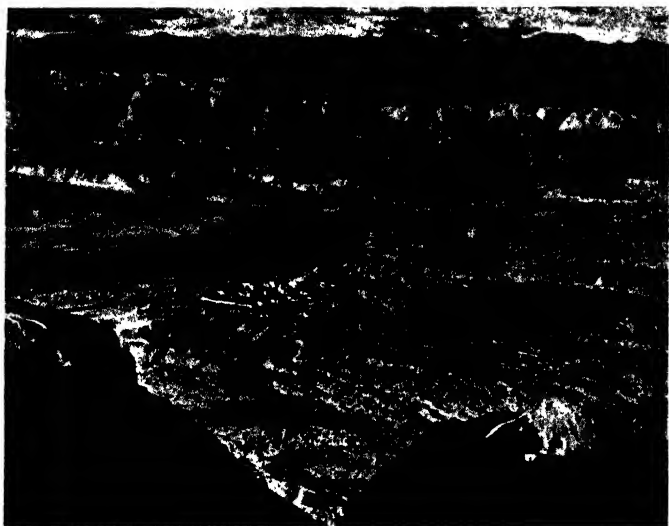
We enter narrow deep gullies; corridors in fantastic



CHAIN BRIDGE OVER THE SUTLEJ AT TOLING



CHAIN BRIDGE AT TOLING. END VIEW



GENERAL VIEW OF TOLING



IN THE INTERIOR OF THE GOMPA

castles; from time to time, wide spaces on which stand vertically towers and peaks—contorted, ponderous—or there rise solitary monolithic columns with enormous capitals. Without a guide it would be impossible to go forward in such an intricate labyrinth. Then too, the lead-coloured, threatening sky endues this weird landscape with sad, shadowy colourings. It is like a nightmare. And we climb and we descend by a road made as no fancy could ever imagine it.

At last we arrive at the top of a pass which appears to us unexpectedly; down below in front of us, still far distant amongst the pale yellow of the undulating desert, stands in ruddy contrast the monastery of Toling, in the centre of an immense basin above which rear themselves in savage contortions mountains of the most extraordinary shapes. At the foot of the pass the Sutlej, which flows slowly towards the east from a gigantic pillared gateway, appears to slacken speed majestically that it may lave the sacred earth.

We halt on the banks of the Sutlej, at the entrance to the famous chain bridge of Toling, of which every one of the rare travellers who have passed this way, since the days of Gerard, has said something.

It is indeed a bridge of an entirely new type, at least for this region; instead of being one of the usual cantilever bridges—which themselves are rare enough in these desolate parts of the world—this one is suspended by means of great chains; the links are made by hand and do not show the slightest trace of rust; after so many years, they are as bright as if they had been made yesterday. Our caravan crosses the bridge with great caution, giving rise nevertheless to frightful oscillations. From the bridge it takes us an hour to reach the *gompà*. Towards 4 p.m. we camp at Toling in a small valley near the monastery.

Near us is also encamped the Superior with the Lamas of his community and his numerous retinue of servants.

Prayers and singing and music until sunset; they are carrying on religious ceremonies.

19th September.

The Lama of Kaze and the *lamberdär* of Poo go to pay a visit in our name to the *Khampo*, carrying to him the letter from the *Zonpön* of Tsaparang, together with our respectful greetings and a suitable offering of money greater than that given to the civil authorities.

In Tibet the order of precedence is observed with meticulous care; and there is no doubt that the *Khampo* of Toling is the superior of all in dignity and rank. The *Garpön* themselves must pay him homage and bow to him when he presents himself.

Like the *Garpön*, he is sent every three years from Lhasa to rule the destinies of the great monastery of Toling; along with him there is also nominated a layman to exercise the functions of *Chansödd* or administrator.

The two spheres of activity are completely distinct and there is no interference; even disciplinary responsibility over the monks and the numerous crowd of people dependent on the convent is entrusted to the *Chansödd*; the *Khampo* concerns himself solely with ceremonial and sacred matters.

The *Khampo* now in office has been here only a short time; he is a doctor (*dGe ſes*) of the great convent of Depung near Lhasa. How it comes about that Toling is not under the jurisdiction of the perpetually renewed incarnation of *Rin c'en bzang po*, whose activity as a translator was clearly connected with this monastery is explained when it is remembered that this was the true and proper royal temple, and therefore must have been

directly dependent on the kings of Guge; when the dynasty was suppressed and Guge was incorporated first with Ladakh and then with Lhasa, the monastery with all its wealth and prerogatives passed to the new governments. The *Khampo* receives our ambassadors very affably, and, to arrange the manner, time and limits of our visit to the monastery he sends to the camp the *Chansòd* in person, preceded by two servants who bring dried fruits in profusion.

After a long and friendly conversation, in which the *Chansòd* shows great interest in our pistols, which he has to see and test again and again, he understands that if we succeed in studying the *gompà* in all its details he will not be disappointed in our liberality. It is more difficult to get from him permission to let us take photographs; indeed, it is a concession to open to us the doors of this most holy place, because the government at Lhasa has absolutely forbidden it to be shown to anybody whatsoever; let us not speak then of taking photographs. But after much insistence and many clear promises, everything is conceded, to our complete satisfaction.

To-day, however, the temple is not open to inspection because the monks are all engaged in certain ceremonies; we are able only to begin and study its external structure and its plan.

As a matter of fact, Toling is now really represented by the monastery itself; for one can hardly apply the name of village to the clay-built huts in its vicinity, or the few caves hollowed out in the sides of some clay rocks, in which live the lay servants of the monastery and its dignitaries. But at one time it must have been very different; on the mountain buttresses which rise sheer from the valley to the south of the convent there remain many ruins of ancient buildings; some must have been



monasteries or chapels with their walls painted dark red; some private dwellings and royal castles; in fact we know from Andrade that the mother of the King of Guge was living here when he along with his royal patron came to visit it in 1624.

And all around are the usual troglodytic grottos in great numbers.

Here again we see in all their tragic reality the traces of that fatal ruin which is reducing this country to an immense desert.

Barley grows so sparsely in the few little fields that it does not seem to manage to vary with patches of green the wretched poverty of the stony waste.

The only thing which resists decay is the monastery with its imposing bulk, its walls which delimit, like the mystic diagram of the *maṇḍala*, its sacred precinct. Within these walls are crowded together *chortèn*, chapels, temples, all coloured scarlet-red like the robes of the monks; and, resplendent in the sunshine, there gleams the golden cupola of the central sanctuary.

Outside the enclosure, at the four angles, but at unequal distances, are four great *Labàb chortèn* (*Lha babs mc'od rten*), that is to say *chortèn* which carry on their four sides four staircases; they commemorate, according to the Indo-Tibetan tradition, the ascent of the Buddha to the Tuṣita paradise, when he went to preach the gospel there to his mother, already ascended there after her earthly death.<sup>1</sup> According to what the monks tell us, in the *chortèn* at the north-west angle would have been preserved the relics of *Rin c'en bzañ po*. It is not improbable that the tradition rests on some foundation of historical truth. Then all around are innumerable *chortèn* large and small, isolated and in groups; a line of 108

<sup>1</sup> v. *Indo-Tibetica*, I.

which surround the holy place on all sides testifies by the great extent of the ruins to the piety of the ancient people.

20th September.

Having sent in advance our Lama and *lamberdâr*, at three o'clock we go to pay a visit to the Superior, who receives us in a friendly manner in his tent.

Interrupted by the usual libations of tea, the conversation between us and the *Khampo* proceeds in very animated style for almost two hours, watched with attention and curiosity by a many-coloured crowd which presses round the door of the tent.

We show the *Khampo* the first two volumes of *Indo-Tibetica*; the appendix to the volume on *Rin c'en bzang po*, with its pages in Tibetan containing the biography of the great saint, interests him in a special way.

Much, almost all, of the information about the life of the *Lotsāva* and the kings of Guge is new to the *Khampo* and his priests; there is not in the whole country one *rnam t'ar*, as they call biographies in Tibetan, of *Rin c'en bzang po*.

It is with difficulty that they become convinced that a foreigner could have been so deeply interested in the life of one of their most revered saints, of whom they themselves no longer know anything.

They desire above all things to possess a copy of the book which in its last pages collects in a beautiful manner what Tibetan literary tradition still knows about one of the greatest figures of Lamaism. It is easy now to convince them that the aim of our journey is a true and real pilgrimage to the places where lived and meditated the great *Lotsāva*, whose love has guided us and has sustained us in so many trials. The *Khampo* now extends to us sincere and cordial friendship; every suspicion

has melted away; all the doors of the monastery will certainly be opened to us.

Towards nightfall, in company with the Lama of Kaze, we climb up to explore the ruins on the slopes and the summit of the clayey mountains which dominate the great *gompà* on the south. It is not really old Toling, as Rawling thinks, but the summer residence of the monks. We have seen that at Tabo also there are two residences for the monks, used according to the seasons.

We find ourselves in half-ruined corridors and we penetrate into the secret recesses of old chapels which, although they have been exposed for so many years to the fury of the tempests, still show in their interiors the remains of magnificent frescoes and statues of coloured stucco of the finest workmanship. The terrorizing gods are in the majority; the uncertain light of the waning day and then our electric torches give to these desecrated temples sudden and unexpected animation.

In the broken desecrated chapels there still keeps watch, with a confused intertwining of his threatening arms, a great image of *Dorje Gigcèd* (*rDorje ajigs byed*), one of the most tremendous manifestations of Mañjuśr intended to drive away evil influences and hostile forces from the holy law.

Further on, the perishing walls show a long procession of infernal deities, those very ones which we have met with at Chang, in the midst of gruesome ornaments of torn human members.

They are the forty-eight *Narag* who lie in wait to snatch away the dying person, and who must be placated in order that the way to the paradise of *Amitābha* may not be blocked.

Through a subterranean gallery which puts into communication the two slopes of the hill, we climb up



FRESCOES IN THE RUINS OF UPPER TOLING

*Facing p. 160*



STATUE OF GIGCÈD IN THE RUINS OF UPPER TOLING

to the ruins of a second temple which is not visible from the plain; in the tunnel we retrieve many leaves of manuscript books, fragments of statues of papier mâché and stucco and numerous *ts'a ts'a*.

Piles of debris everywhere. In a grotto underneath, into which we can barely crawl because of the smallness of the opening, we find other fragments of statues of wood and stucco, pieces of frames of gilded copper which must once have been the haloes of gigantic images; and then, thrown together in a heap, a whole library; the jumbled remains of ancient copies of the *Kangiür* and the *Tanghiür*; some folios still preserve superb miniatures. It is not improbable that some of the illuminated sheets, which may very well rival ours of the Renaissance, are the work of Indian artists, refugees whom Mohammedan persecution drove forth from the profaned Indian universities towards this land where Buddhism was prospering with renewed fervour.

This was the place visited by Young, and from which he carried away, unknown to the Lamas, those fragments of statuary and those books which were deposited in the museum of Lahore.<sup>1</sup> We also plan how we may follow

<sup>1</sup> v. "A Journey to Toling and Tsaparang in Western Tibet", in *Journal of the Panjab Historical Society*, Vol. VII, n. 2, p. 194. "I found no copper or brass idols in either of the temples. If there ever had been any, they were removed to Toling when the monastery was abandoned. A few of the stucco and papier mâché statues, some fragments of woodwork, and considerable sections of books, still awaiting a translator, are now in the Lahore Museum. The story of their getting there would swell this paper to yet more inordinate length, and, though exciting, must be left untold. It was essential that the Lamas should not know, for while these gentry take no interest in the relics which they and their predecessors have neglected for centuries, they would rather leave them to decay than let it be known that a European had carried them off. Such an event would lower their dignity. This sentiment is admirable when applied to the treasures of Toling itself; and I appreciated the Lamas' contemptuous refusal of the big prices which I offered them for one or two small statuettes in the side chapels there. But the objects in the ruined monastery had neither an owner nor intrinsic value, and their removal to a place where they would be appreciated and cared for aroused no qualms in my conscience. As the guide, whose assistance was invaluable, had predicted, a few Lamas were found doing nothing in particular in my camp when I returned. But we were all empty-handed just then, and they moved away satisfied."

his example. It is the duty of a scientist; the Tibetans take no care of their sacred monuments and the treasures enclosed in them; quite impassive, they look on at the ruin of precious material in which their ancestors have expressed symbolically their experiences, in which they have consigned to writing their mystic visions and their metaphysical conceptions, or where they have registered the chronicles of their political life.

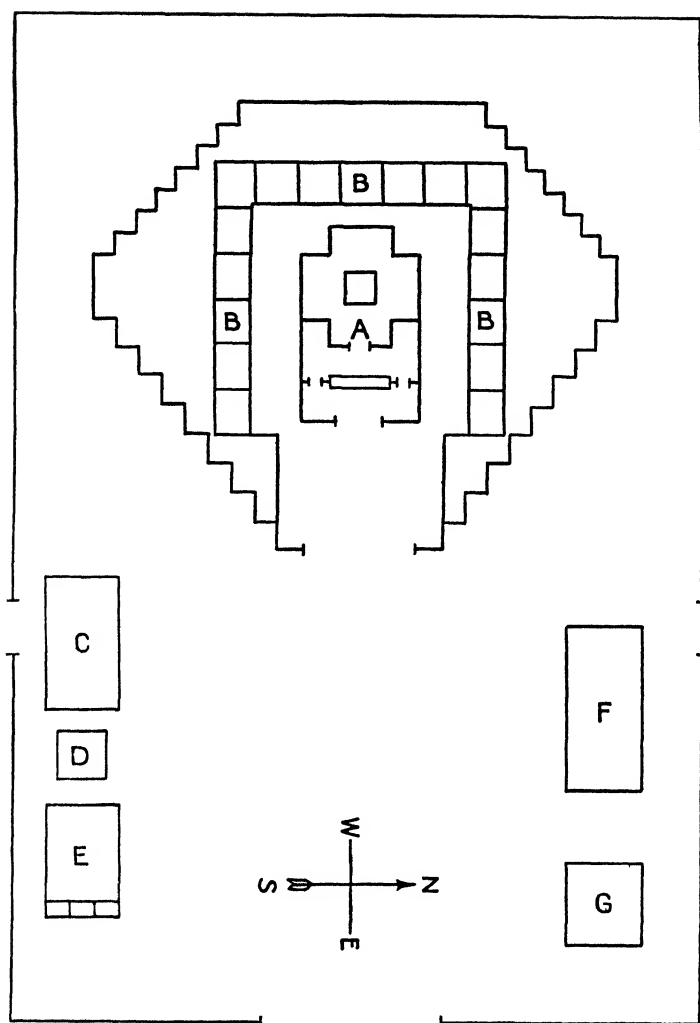
21st September.

The Superior of the monastery has given us permission to photograph without any restriction all the chapels and frescoes, putting at our service one of the most able and intelligent Lamas in the community. He is a *Ghelön* (*dGe slon*), a Mongolian who has studied at Tashilunpo, the only one who can read and write and who has some knowledge of his religion and of the scriptures. All the monks in the *gompà* do not to-day number more than thirty, but at the time of Andrade there were five hundred.

At the beginning of our visit we perceive that the monastery was shown only in part to our predecessors; we therefore consider it necessary to make a plan which will complete that reproduced by Young (v. fig. 3).<sup>1</sup>

Externally, the largest temple, which rises at the extreme north of the precinct, presents the shape of a *maṇḍala*, in agreement with a plan which we have already found elsewhere; the same scheme is reproduced in the central chapel, which is cruciform, just as is in the shape of a cross the *maṇḍala*, which in its original and schematic form is reduced to a central point from which four lines diverge towards the four cardinal points,

<sup>1</sup> In the plan only the sacred buildings are marked; private dwellings and *chortén* are excluded. For the detailed study of all the chapels of Toling and the reproduction of the frescoes reference should be made to Volume V of *Indo-Tibetica*



A. Temple of *Ye tes 'od*. B. Chapels. C. *qDus k'añ*. D. *sToñ rgyud*.  
E. Temple of the 16 *arhat*. F. *Lha k'añ dñar po*. G. *dKil k'añ o gSer k'añ*.

Fig. 3.—Schematic plan of the temples and chapels of Toling



symbolic of the emanation of the cosmos from the first principle—in the present case Vairocana. The Tantric cycle represented in this temple is the *Vajradhātumaṇḍala*, concerning which there exists in the *Tanghiür* a vast literature, mystical and liturgical. The statue of Vairocana is at the centre, Akṣobhya in the east, Ratnasambhava in the south, and so on for Amitābha and Amoghasidhi.<sup>1</sup> The chapels which form the different arms of the cross are literally covered with frescoes showing the finest execution; the whole Mahāyānic pantheon, especially that connected with the cycles of Sarvavid Vairocana, Guhyasamāja, and Saṃvaratantra, is represented here with a vivacity of colour, a freshness of design, a profusion of ornaments which would be sought for vainly elsewhere. According to tradition, *Rin c'en bzai po* used to live in the chapel of Ratnasambhava; the legend is perhaps derived from the similarity in the names *Rin c'en bzai po* and *Rin c'en abyun ldan*, which is the Tibetan name of Ratnasambhava.

The temple itself keeps its ancient name; not only is it known as the temple of *Ye ses 'od*, the celebrated king of Guge who invited Atiśa into Tibet and who was the patron of *Rin c'en bzai po*, but it is called also *Palpeme Luntrub Lacan* (*dpal dpe med lhuñ gyis grub pai Lha k'an*). It was a place celebrated in the culture of Tibet; because many works of the Buddhistic dogma and mysticism were, within its walls and in the peace of its chapels, translated into Tibetan by a chosen band of pundits and translators, who, when Buddhism declined in India, were transplanted into this land of the snows.

It is with a sense of profound reverence that we

<sup>1</sup> For fuller particulars about this cycle refer to Volume III of *Indo-Tibetica*. The plan of the chapel of *Ye ses 'od* imitates that of the temple of Somapura discovered at Paharpur. v. *Archæological Survey of India. Annual Report, 1927-1928*, Pl. XLV.

visit this temple, from which a crowd, to-day almost unknown, of thinkers and ascetics shed over the whole of Tibet a spiritual light which is not yet extinguished; and it is with sincere emotion that we kindle the votive lamps in front of the meditating statues of its gods.

The value of a religion consists in the intensity and the sincerity with which it is lived and realized in the conscience of the believer, because no guarantee can reach us of the absolute verity of its content other than by the consent, always relative and contingent, of the feeling and the intelligence of an individual or a group of individuals. The concrete reality of religion is its verification in experiences, its transmutation into the animating force of life, into the impulse overwhelmingly felt to translate its message into the immediateness of an experience.

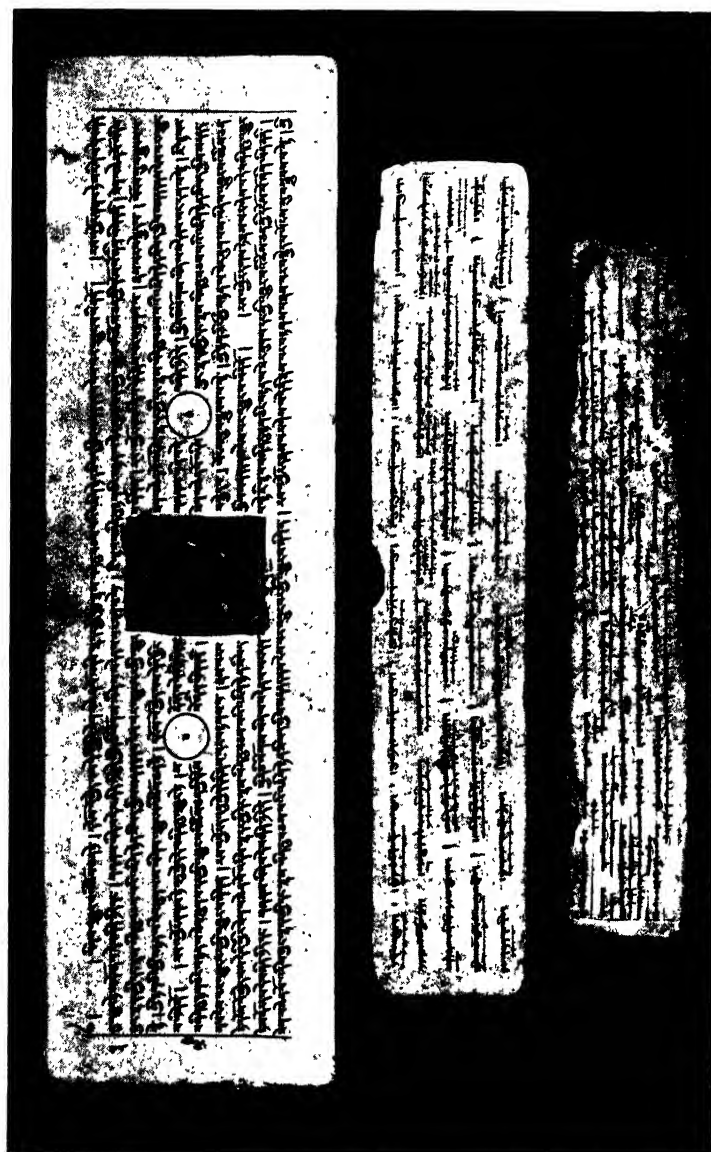
In the presence of those images which have received for centuries the offerings of trembling generations of worshippers, beseeching, with blind faith, favour or succour, in front of those people who, having subdued the desires of the flesh, withdrew from life and sacrificed everything in order almost to annihilate themselves and to lose themselves in ecstasies and ineffable blessedness springing from the completeness of their mystic exaltation, we bow ourselves with that reverence with which one approaches the noblest manifestations of the spirit. A reality perhaps even truer than the material, because the concrete and living representation of the idealistic aspirations most profound, most deeply felt and most intimately endured by a whole body of believers; the spiritual inheritance which dwells with and comforts a people in the perpetually renewed afflictions of its history, and yet perhaps one of the many illusions which, in the fatal course of time, in the inevitable passing and vanish-

ing of all things, humanity creates for itself in order to free itself somewhat from the dreaded certainty of death.

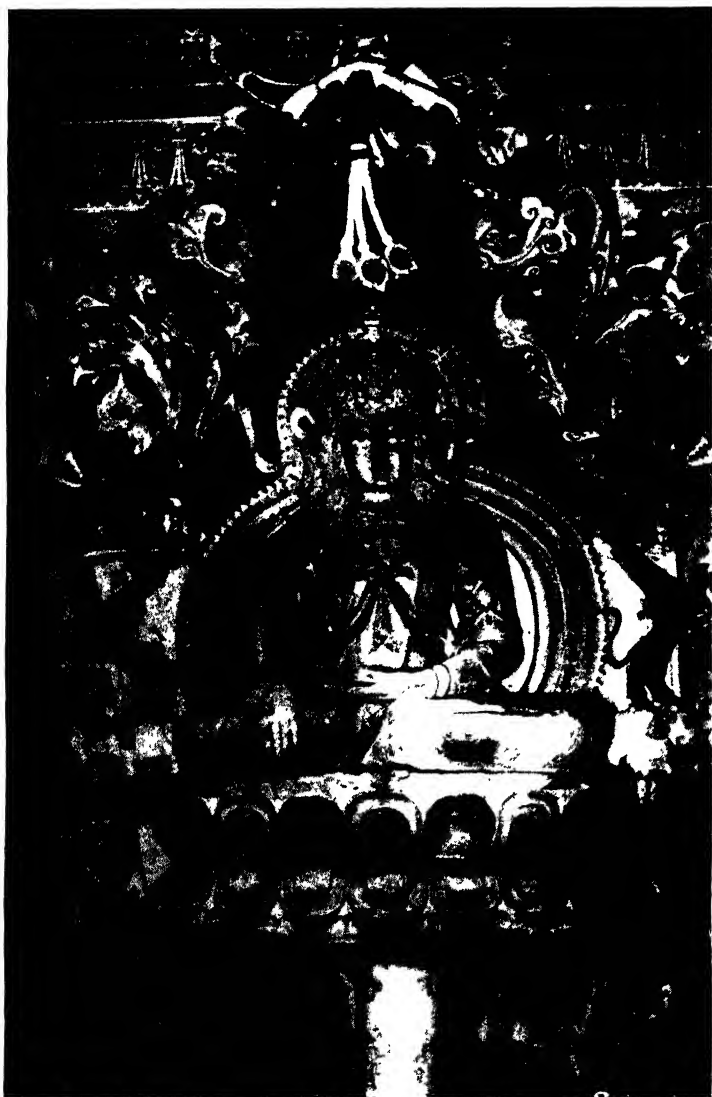
After we leave the temple of *Xe ses 'od*, having photographed its walls, its statues and all details, we commence visiting the chapels which surround it; there are twenty of them. Except for some which show traces of re-touching and restoration, they too seem very old; they are covered with frescoes and stuccoes and full of an incredible quantity of statues of every shape and size. In each one we take rough notes and photographs; the cycles which predominate are those of Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Vajrapāṇi, Śaṃvara and the gods of medicine. As far as we can see, there is no trace of Śiva who, according to Young, was figured with great frequency here in Toling. It is logical. Whilst other Hindu divinities have been accepted by the Mahāyāna, if only as disciples of the Buddha, Buddhism has always entertained profound aversion for Śiva; it is so true that Śiva and his celestial spouse Umā are often represented as being trampled under foot and crushed by Śaṃvara or by Vajrapāṇi.

The deities whom Young takes for Śiva are the Lokapāla, who are generally represented on animal vehicles; whilst the archangel Michael whom Andrade would like to identify in the figure of a god with a sword and cuirass who is threatening a demon already thrown to the ground and trampled under his feet is probably one of the very numerous terrorizing gods (*k'ro bo*) who are never absent from the entrances to temples.

The *Tonghiud lacan* (*sTon rgyud lha k'an*) owes its name to an enormous prayer-mill; judged by its proportions, this must contain in its interior a whole library; and as every turn corresponds in effect to the reading of the sacred pages which are enclosed, great merit accrues to the devotee who sets it revolving.



ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS FOUND IN THE RUINS OF UPPER TOLING



STATUE IN STUCCO OF RATNASAMBHAVA IN THE LARGE  
TEMPLE AT TOLING

The temple is now desecrated; on the opposite end wall is a great figure of Śākyamuni, on the two side-walls Avalokiteśvara and Tārā. All around, frescoes which reproduce the many Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa, that is, of the cosmic era in which we are living.

In a state of equal abandonment stands another great temple with a lofty carved roof and wooden columns made of deodar trunks, brought perhaps from Chitkul or from Kunāvar.

The entrance, with its barbaric design, ponderous capitals and heavy lines betrays distinct Indian influence; it reproduces with its architraves rudely hewn and superposed, the *vimāna*, the celestial chariot, in the middle of which iconography usually represents the gods; above, two antelopes facing on the right and left of a wheel, are intended to symbolize, repeating the very ancient motives of Buddhistic iconography, the first preaching of the law. The walls are completely covered with frescoes of splendid merit, to which the shining patina still gives an air of newness and freshness, although they must go back to the sixteenth or fifteenth centuries.

The temple is called *lacān carpo* (*lha k'añ dkar po*), "the white temple"; that indicates in all probability that every trace of its ancient name is lost. In the centre, a great image of Śākyamuni, and all around the eight gods of medicine.

The principal deities represented on the walls are: *Tsoñ k'a pa*, *Sa skya Pañ c'en*, *Vijayā*, *Sitāpatrā*, *Tārā*, *Prajñāpārāmitā* and a series of extraordinarily important pictures, which represent cemeteries with spirits of the dead, wild beasts devouring corpses, ascetics in meditation, and the divinities who preside over these macabre places, to which many *siddha* were accustomed to retire that they might strive after mystic perfection.

There is a picture which reproduces graphically the long ascent and mortification of the Buddha, who, before attaining the supreme illumination, tried every means of eliminating the sad necessity for suffering.

The *Dücan* (*adus k'an*), "assembly hall", is on the opposite side; in the centre, a gigantic figure of the Buddha in gilded bronze with *Amitāyus* and *Maitreya* at the two sides; the pictures which decorate the walls are already almost all defaced or about to disappear. The temple, as the name indicates, is used to-day as an assembly room for the monks, who perform their daily offices in it, seated on two lines of cushions which run parallel in the centre from the door to the altar; placed on little tables all around are the various instruments for ritual ceremonies; vases for holy water (*bum pa*), plates for the offerings (*torma*), and butter-lamps; almost all in finely wrought silver.

No better fate has the temple of the sixteen *Arhat*, so called from the stucco figures of the sixteen protectors of the law, to whom passes in succession the holy garment of the Buddha, and who will guard the holy doctrine till the advent of the future Buddha, that is, *Maitreya*, around whom, in certain Buddhist circles in the East, are centred messianic ideals of salvation, by no means free from political contamination and badly concealed rancour against Europe and its beliefs. The statues are inferior by a long way to those we have found in the temple of *Ye ses 'od* and without a doubt have been re-made at no very distant date. On the walls the usual series of the Buddhas of the *Bhadrakalpa*.

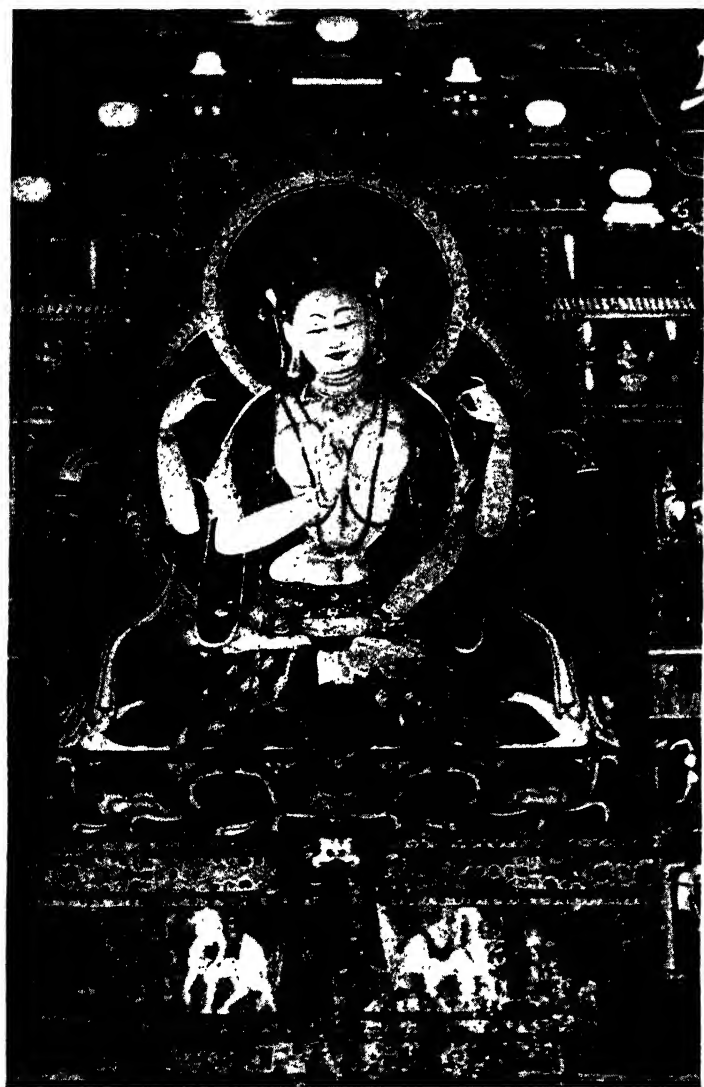
To the left of the door is painted on a long panel the history of *Sadāprarudita* which the *Prajñāpāramitā* has rendered famous. The various episodes of the legend can easily be identified, as the scenes are always accom-



CHAPELS AT TOLING. ALTARS

*Facing p. 168*





FRESCO IN THE WHITE TEMPLE OF TOLING REPRESENTING  
THE PRAJNĀPĀRAMITĀ

panied by inscriptions in ancient spelling which we photograph when the preservation of the painting permits.

More important still are some panels rather defaced by water leaking in from the roof, in which there is pictured, through the medium of the principal actors and agents, the history of Greater Tibet and Western Tibet, and the various centres of the diffusion of Buddhism in the land of snow.

In addition to a group of three monks who reappear also at Tabo and who represent the princes of Guge who took the vows—the so-called king-priests—that is to say: *Ye ses 'od*, *Byan c'ub 'od*, and *Ži ba 'od*, we see figured there *Kri sron lde btsan*, *Ral pa can*, *Devaprabha*, and *Ye ses 'od*.

The pictures are extraordinarily interesting for the history of costume.

We are then admitted to the temple which is perhaps the most sacred in all Toling, the *Sercàn* (*gSer k'an*) never before profaned by a foreigner.

It is the *Sanctum sanctorum* of the whole monastery; we reach it by way of a corridor and a door of deodar completely covered with divine images; Indian work without a doubt contemporary with the foundation of the temple. The *Sercàn* is built in three stories which diminish upwards, so that the building resembles in some degree a truncated pyramid; it is not improbable that in style it copies celebrated Indian models, especially the temple with three terraces at Odantapuri, so famous in Tibetan tradition, by which the first architects of the land of the snows are so deeply inspired.

One goes from the first to the second floor and from the second to the third by means of small external staircases which lead to narrow verandas with pilasters and cornices of sculptured wood; the stair which leads to

the third terrace is broken. The walls of every cell are covered with superb frescoes which, considering the delicacy of the execution, might almost be called miniatures.

Buddhistic mysticism and the more esoteric Tantra schools are here represented in the diagram of various *maṇḍala*, to which the disciple was introduced by his spiritual guide after long years of novitiate, preparation and meditation. Then were revealed to him the most secret mysteries of the faith; and the truth disclosed to him, being transformed into life, conferred on him regeneration and transported him for ever to those higher levels of knowledge from which it is impossible to recede.

The principal cycles are those of *Vairocana* (*Kun rig-Sarvavid*), *Guhyasamāja*, *Samvara* and *Kālacakra*.

We photograph everything. With the material thus collected it will now be possible to make a complete study of one of the oldest and most celebrated monasteries in Tibet, and, with the aid of the ample mystic literature of which this art is none other than the symbolic expression, it will be possible to understand all its hidden significance.

22nd September, Tsaparang.

We have decided to leave for Tsaparang, and so we ask for an audience with the *Khampo* in order that we may take leave of him and express our gratitude to him. We find him in his room squatting with crossed legs on a kind of throne near his private shrine. We ask from him a great deal of information about problems of ritual and religious iconography.

Once more we have occasion to admire his learning and his goodness; his features, rather irregular, seem to be lit up with a spiritual radiance which transfigures them. It is this inner life which draws him close to us

and which renders our leave-taking almost sad; before going away he wishes to bless us and he places his hands on the head of one of the two of us, giving us his *cinlabb* (*byin brlabs*).

We depart in silence, as those do who are parting from a dear friend.

We set out at midday and in a few hours we traverse the road which runs between Toling and Tsaparang; it is only ten kilometres and the road is good and almost all level. Water is scarce.

We encamp under the ruins of the city in the vicinity of a stream which flows into the Sutlej.

In front of us the whole hillside is covered with tremendous ruins; a dead city which seems to be keeping vigil over the desolate abandonment of the yellow, tormented waste of stones, with the empty eye-sockets of its ruined castle and of its ruinous troglodytic dwellings.

Local tradition says that in the times of the kings of Guge the city possessed 3000 families; but probably this is an exaggeration, because, even admitting that Coresma, who does not seem well disposed towards the mission to Western Tibet, has, more or less purposely, over-coloured the picture in order to show the uselessness of every work of evangelization in Guge, it would appear from his famous letters, that the population of Tsaparang was not very numerous; according to him only 500 persons.<sup>1</sup> But the ruins, even excluding the royal palace, are very vast, too vast if the population is reduced to only 500 people; if local tradition errs in running to excess, the information of the missionary errs by being too low.

The importance of Tsaparang was due not only to its being the capital, but also to its position, which made

<sup>1</sup> Weassels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia*, p. 83. As the Tibetans count by families, it will be necessary perhaps to read "500 families".

it a commercial emporium of the first rank. According to Andrade, the king had agents even as far away as Delhi and Lahore; merchants from China bringing clothing and porcelain crowded into its bazaars.<sup>1</sup> With Garhwal business relations must have been constant, at such times as guerilla warfare with the frontier rajahs or the blocking of the passes by snow did not temporarily obstruct them; Tsaparang must have been the centre where stores were replenished by all the neighbouring provinces from Spiti to Rudok and Thok Jalung. The opulence of the place, testified to still by the ruins, the temples and the castles, depended not only on the local products—wool, salt and borax—but above all on the commerce which the indigenous dynasties must have fostered to a high degree.

23rd September.

We have devoted the whole day to the exploration of the ruins and the temples which remain. The landscape is mournful; everything here speaks of desertion and defacement. One cannot be gay. The ancient royal chapels, decorated with the most superb examples of mural paintings we have seen up till now, are desecrated and desolate; many are beginning to perish. In this solitude everything seems terrifying.

By degrees, as one climbs from the temples in the valley to the little shrines on the summit of the hill amongst jumbled piles of stones and rubbish, the placid, serene divinities, the meditating Buddhas and the monks immersed in blissful contemplation give place to Tantric deities and demons and terrifying *Ciokidn* (*c'os skyon*). In the half-shadow of the sacristy which receives scanty light from a small door one sees vaguely delineated a

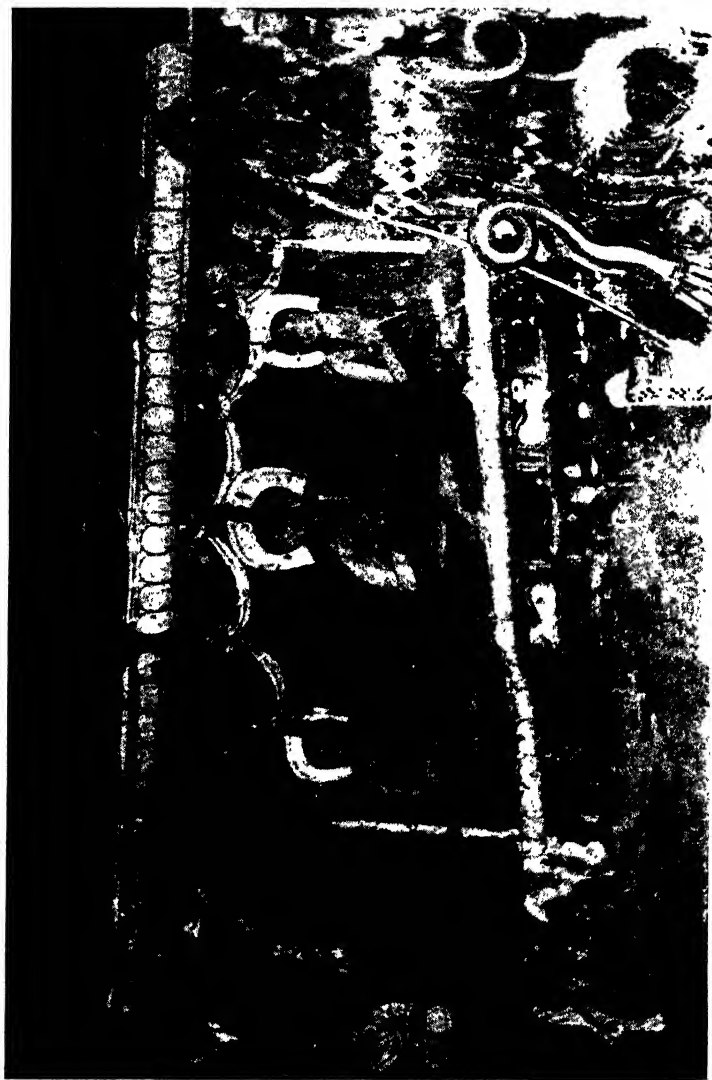
<sup>1</sup> v. *O Descobrimento do Tibet pelo P. Antonio de Andrade*, edited by F. M. Esteves Pereira, Coimbra, 1921, pp. 65 and 72; cf. Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 65.



RITUAL OBJECTS



RITUAL LAMPS



TOLING. TEMPLE OF THE 16 *ARHAT*. FRESCO REPRESENTING  
THE KING-PRIESTS OF GUGE

procession of monstrous creatures such as only the fancy of a sick man could imagine; savage heads and dozens of arms projecting from one and the same body, brandishing the strangest weapons, macabre dances to the rhythmic sound of strings of skulls, and obscene embraces amongst flames breaking out in the drunkenness of bloody orgies. A whole world of fantastic and terrifying visions is symbolized in these pictures, in a manner so vivid and powerful, that in these temples one almost feels transported into an unreal world of nightmare and anguish. As if all the terrors of a people pictured there, evoked by the sacrilegious violators of the silent recesses, would like to leap forth from the walls and come to life and drag one into their dances.

And the custodian who accompanies us refuses to act as guide and is not willing to open the doors of these dreadful chapels, and when he does decide to give us the keys remains outside and seems almost to communicate his terror to ourselves.

We have commenced the visit to the temple which stands on the plain, not very far from our camp; it is called *lotàn gompà* (*blo t'añ dgon pa*), and shows the characteristic plan of the chapels built during the first dynasty of Guge, with atrium and niche.

Although in charge of the monks of Toling, who have the keys of it, it is on the way to ruin; many of the pictures are already destroyed by water.

The great stucco figure in the niche is Vairocana, the deity who, as the centre of the *Vajradhātumaṇḍala*, was specially venerated throughout the community founded by *Rin c'en bzañ po*; on the walls to the right and left two large *maṇḍala* connected with the same Tantric cycle; and as a border the life of the Buddha represented in accordance with traditional schemes.

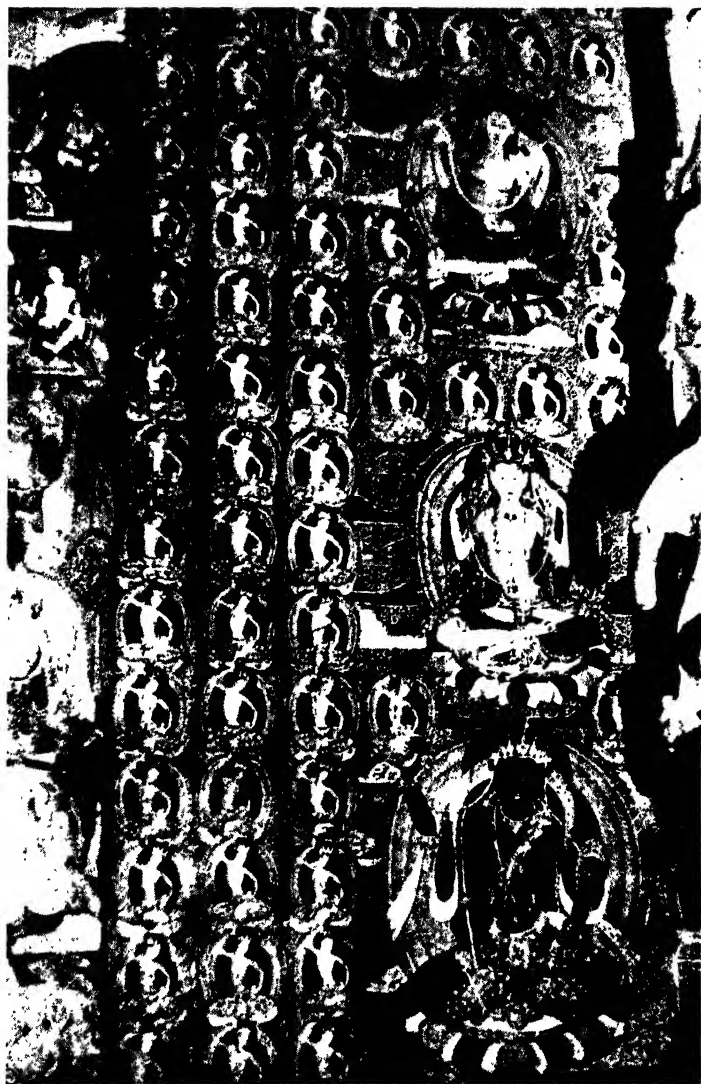


Besides the gods of medicine and the other commoner deities of Tibetan iconography, special mention should be given to the figure of the goddess Kargyal mounted on a goat, which is seen still above the door; Kargyal was a protecting demon of the village before, by the power of the venerable *Lotsāva*, the district was converted to Buddhism; subdued by magic arts, Kargyal herself accepted the new faith and became the protectress of the temples. Her image is very frequently found in the pictures of this region, and usually is accompanied by *ciokion* or *dvārapāla*.

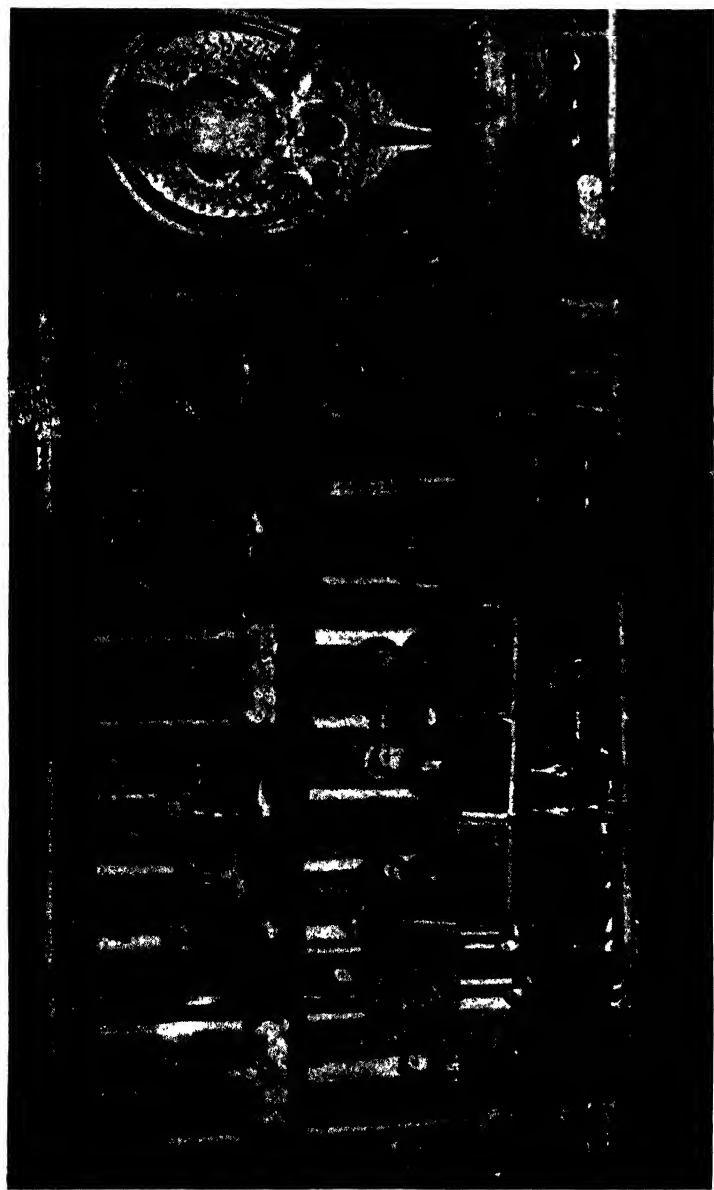
Having crossed the defile which separates our camp from the ruins of the village and forded the stream, we climb up to the other large *gompā*, also nameless, for it is now called by the simple term of *Lacān car po* (*Lha k'an dkar po*), "the white temple". Water has again begun its work of destruction; whole walls have been defaced, many of the frescoes for ever destroyed; even some of the stucco statues are beginning to moulder away. There is no doubt but that in a few years the temple will be a heap of ruins.

It is fortunate that we have arrived just in time to preserve, through the evidence of photography, the dim record of the splendour of these royal chapels in which a forgotten crowd of artists has, with a patience equal to their art, represented the most profound legends and visions of Mahāyānic Buddhism.

The Buddha of gilded bronze and gigantic proportions looks down with the impassive serenity of his smile on the ruin which is slowly invading his dwelling; some of the many statuettes of the Buddha and the Buddhistic masters, which, resting on small brackets, surround him in various attitudes, are already thrown down. Some of the walls are frescoed with figures so



DETAILS OF THE FRESCOES IN THE RED TEMPLE AT  
TSAPARANG



FRESCOES REPRESENTING SCENES AT THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE OF TSAPARANG

minute and so perfect that, as in the *Sercàn* at Toling, one gets the impression of being in front of a series of minatures multiplied *ad infinitum*.

One understands how it was that Andrade was struck with amazement at such art and at the high skill in painting attained by the masters of Guge.

The cycle which is reproduced in the temple is still that of *Vajradhātumaṇḍala* with his supreme pentad; around the five symbols of the cosmic emanation from the primal consciousness there are scenes from paradises and lives of saints and the infinite variety of the Mahā-yānic pantheon.

Along the sides to the right of the central niche, the whole genealogy of the kings of Guge; each prince in his panoply and having his name alongside him. Unfortunately they are so high that the small characters can neither be read nor photographed; and as far as search has been made no one has succeeded in finding a single ladder in the two or three inhabited houses of Tsaparang.

In a frieze within the niche there are reproduced, with richness of detail, truthfulness, and an admirable sense of movement, scenes from the foundation of the temple, from the ceremonies which were carried out on that occasion and from the festivals which were celebrated: a ray of light on the life of Tsaparang before ruin exterminated it.

The same marvels are waiting for us in the other large temple which rises above this and which is called the *Lacàn marpò* (*Lha k'an dmar po*), "the red temple".

In the central niche, two gigantic statues of the Buddha, one behind the other; and around them the eight gods of medicine bordered by rich frames, the ornamental motives of which also recur in the frescoes on the two lateral walls. *Tārā* is there and *Vajrapāṇi*

and the sacred pentad. We are here in front of the supreme splendour of the art of Guge, of which the pictures in the royal temples at Ladakh are only very degenerate derivatives.

As in the other chapel, the artists have set forth in a series of pictures the principal scenes enacted at the foundation of the temple, with such realism that it is easy to recognize the various types of people who were trading in Tsaparang in those days. Occupying a special position are the caravans which bear the beams employed for the construction of the sacred edifices. The whole ceiling is painted in long parallel bands with floral and geometric motives and a series of *maṇḍala*: a feast of colours which water is already beginning to demolish in many places.

Near this temple another of more modest dimensions. The Tibetan official who accompanies us and the custodian resort to every subterfuge to avoid showing it to us; first they say that there is nothing inside it, then that they cannot find the keys, finally they confess the truth: the temple is opened once a year; there is inside a terrifying deity who must not be disturbed. One never knows what might be the consequences of this unusual intrusion of strange people. We take upon ourselves all the consequences, we open the doors whilst the people who accompany us prudently remain outside; only our Lama enters with us; we place on the altar the votive lamp which we have already prepared, and having accustomed ourselves to the half-darkness in which the temple is shrouded we begin our inspection of it. A gigantic statue of *Maitreya* of gilded bronze; in front, *Gigcèd* (*ajigs byed*, *Bhairava*), represented with five heads, the central one of which is that of a buffalo; a monstrous creature which, in its thirst for slaying, seems almost

to be multiplied into a thing of many arms brandishing strange and frightful weapons. He is not a god of evil, but an emanation from the lofty compassion of *Mañjuśrī* who takes the form of such terrible apparitions in order to succour the faithful and the faith when obstructed and threatened by the forces of wickedness. Terrorizing does not enter into the Buddhistic iconography except as a manifestation of pity; not as a threat which hangs over humanity or as a blind force lying in ambush, but as succour and defence.

On the walls, in ancient and excellent frescoes, a long procession of Tantric deities; close to *Gigcèd*, a multitude of statues in gilded bronze of superb workmanship; we note amongst others those of *Hevajra* and *Samvara* in the attitude which in Tibetan is called *Yab-yum*—"father-mother", the mystic union, which is intended to symbolize the blessedness of the supreme illumination which is derived from the union of two fundamental co-efficients—compassion for created beings and intuition the liberator.

Then upwards again to the temple of the *trutòb* (*agrub t'ob*), that is, of the *Siddha*, "the perfect man"; without a door, desecrated, dilapidated, crumbling; on the central wall another figure of *Gigcèd*, and all around a series of capital frescoes in which Tantric iconography, with all its deformed and monstrous deities, has been pictured by unknown artists in its many-coloured, strange procession, the pictorial symbol of complex mystical states, meditation on which raises to higher spiritual levels, and which have no message for us, except perhaps of repugnance, until we learn how to interpret them in their true significance.

The value of these paintings is increased by the inscriptions which generally accompany them. We have

fortunately arrived in time to consign to the records of our photographs one of the most notable masterpieces of the ancient artistic schools of Western Tibet, and one of the most important monuments of Tantric iconography.

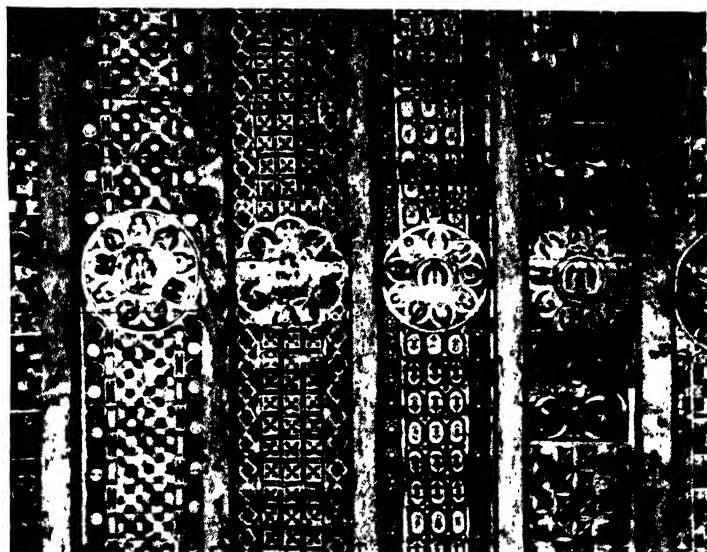
At the top of the slope, amongst the wreckage and rubbish of the dismantled royal castle, all blind alleys, tunnels, terraces and spacious halls, there are the remains of the small temple of *Demcog* (*bDe mc'og-Saṃvara*), in which was worshipped the *yi-dam* or tutelary spirit of the village and castle and which was perhaps the initiatory chapel. In the centre there exists still the basement of the great *maṇḍala* of the cycle, around which were fixed the stucco images of the sixty-two deities who compose it; now there are left of them only a few fragments. The pictures on the walls illustrate, in a series of panels executed with that mastery which already we have so often admired in these artists of Guge, the whole cycle of *Saṃvara* and the *Guhyasamāja*, practices akin to each other, which, by means of complicated mystic processes, aimed at evolving from an imperfect creature such as man, a being of absolute perfection far removed from the vicissitudes of existence. It was here that, in the times of the kings of Guge, was conferred by masters now unknown the baptism of initiation.

To-day it looks as if the stony wilderness were climbing upwards from the valley with a slow but inexorable advance and that it is engulfing in its naked yellow throat the last vestiges of a great past.

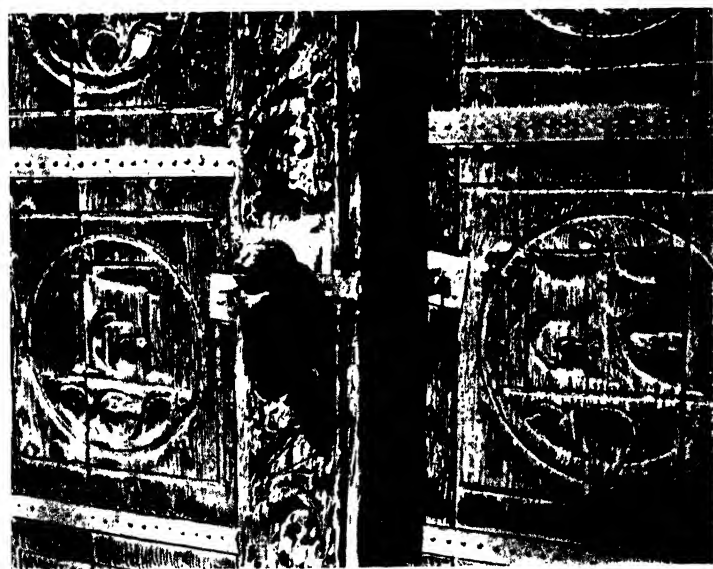
We descend to the camp sad and disconsolate, like men who have looked upon death.

We search for those traces of the mission of Andrade and Christianity, introduced here in the seventeenth century, of which Young<sup>1</sup> makes mention; at first we

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 198.



PAINTED CEILING OF THE TEMPLE AT TSAPARANG



DETAILS OF THE DOOR OF THE TEMPLE OF GIGCÉD  
AT TSAPARANG

*Facing p. 174*





CIORTEN WHICH SEEMS TO BE SURMOUNTED BY A CROSS

take to be one of them a cross planted above a gigantic *chortèn* at the foot of the village. But we find this to be a delusion; that cross is none other than the central axis of the *chortèn* (called in technical language *srog jin*) on which is fixed transversely a stick which serves as a framework for that symbolic ornament with which every *chortèn* must be finished off at the top: that is to say the half-moon and the solar disk, made usually of stucco which therefore must have a support. Every *chortèn* in a ruinous condition might give this illusory impression of being surmounted by a cross; we illustrate a characteristic example seen in Spiti (v. Plate).

Besides, the importance of the Catholic mission to Tsaparang has been exaggerated; above all it is not true that Andrade baptized the king; even Wessels has had to recognize that a similar observation of Young's cannot be documented in any way.<sup>1</sup>

Many of our missionaries in the East have been surprised at this anxiety on the part of learned and intelligent people to learn the particulars of the doctrines and the faith which they profess. In this the Hindu and the Buddhistic conceptions are distinguished—except in sporadic cases of bigotry—from the Christian; every religion, they consider, is good for him who feels it and lives it with sincerity. The roads which lead to God are many and all equally good; created beings are naturally diverse in tendencies, habits, moral and intellectual capacity, and cannot all follow the same way and have the same experiences.

Hence one does not speak of one religion as being false, and another true; what is realized in spiritual life cannot be false; one can only speak of a greater or less approximation to that eternal truth which all religions

<sup>1</sup> Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 78. Besides, Andrade himself confesses it; *Pereira*, p. 67.  
(x 884) 13

aim at reaching. The sympathy which the king of Tsaparang showed for the religion of which Andrade spoke to him is a normal and natural thing; but it does not imply abjuration. In the case of this king of Guge, there are other motives which have to be considered; his ruin has been attributed by some to his conversion to Christianity; as a matter of fact, from the very letters of Andrade and his successors it seems, on the contrary, that he had concocted a complete political plan intended to contest and oppose the authority and the preponderance of the Lamas; he wanted to reduce the number of the Lamas and even thought of turning them all into laymen.

To these internal motives, to this antagonism of his towards the religious community, to the intrigues of the Lamas, to the revolt of certain provinces which had already shaken and weakened his power<sup>1</sup> must be added, as perhaps the fundamental cause of the disastrous war with Ladakh which led to his defeat and imprisonment, the unexpected and inexplicable refusal to marry the sister of *Señ ge rnam rgyal*, the powerful lord of Leh.<sup>2</sup> Into all this his sympathies with Christianity do not enter or enter to a very slight extent.

It is true that Francke has considered that he found traces of the apostasy of this king in the chronicles of Ladakh, in which are mentioned the wars with the kings of Guge and it is said that *Señ ge rnam rgyal* "made himself master of *Tsa brañ* and *los loñ*".

He understands "*los loñ*" to be an epithet and translates it as "the really blind ones", adducing this blindness to be the supposed apostasy of the last king of Guge.

It is clear that such an interpretation is not admissible;

<sup>1</sup> Andrade, in *Pereira*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

the name of *Tsa brañ*—an error on the part of the amanuensis for *Tsa pa rañ*—suggests that the term also which follows it may refer to a place or a city. There is no doubt that the scribes have with the usual carelessness and the customary errors reproduced badly the copy placed at their disposal; instead of *los loñ* must be read “*l'o gliñ*” or “*l'o liñ*”. Thus the change in spelling from one form to the other is easily explained.<sup>1</sup>

Neither does the phrase read by Francke in an inscription in the vicinity of Tabo (of which, besides, we could find no trace in spite of all the search we made), which reads—“he who expels the darkness of all apostasy from the palace of Tsaparang”, contain the slightest reference to the leanings of the king of Guge towards Christianity. It is an official phrase in the documents in the chancery of Western Tibet, as many inscriptions and dedications of books collected by us go to prove.

Who this last and unfortunate king of Guge was we do not yet know; for “the *Chodakpo*”, as he is styled, is an honorary title, not a personal name; *Chodakpo* does not correspond to *ʃo drag po* (the strong, the severe lord), as Francke<sup>2</sup> thought but is synonymous with the usual *c'os rgyal* (*Dharmarāja*) “the king protector of the law”, “the king who governs according to the law”; it corresponds, that is, to an original *c'os bdag po* (*Dharmapati*).

It is clear then that many of those theories which have been rather hastily built up concerning the fall of the kingdom of Guge do not stand critical examination.

<sup>1</sup> The spelling of *Toling* in the manuscripts undergoes the greatest alterations; thus, for example, in the *bKa' t'añ sde lha* it becomes *mk'o mt'ih*. v. *Indo-Tibetica*, II, p. 64, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Wessels, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

25th September, Toshang.

The road which we traverse to-day winds round the hill on which the ruins of Tsaparang mingle with the depressing bareness of the rock, and, following the course of a dried-up stream, bears away towards the south.

There accompanies us the official who at Tsaparang acts as substitute for the absent Prefect and manages his house; he is courtesy itself, but the courtesy is not at all disinterested.

Once the bed of the stream is abandoned we move towards the south-west, and climb across a sandy plain which culminates in a boundless yellow desert furrowed by fractures and gigantic rifts which run parallel as far as the Sutlej. The zone which we are now crossing is called generically *Lomè* (that is, *Lho smad*), "the part far south". It is scarcely known at all, and even the information which we have about it is meagre and inexact.

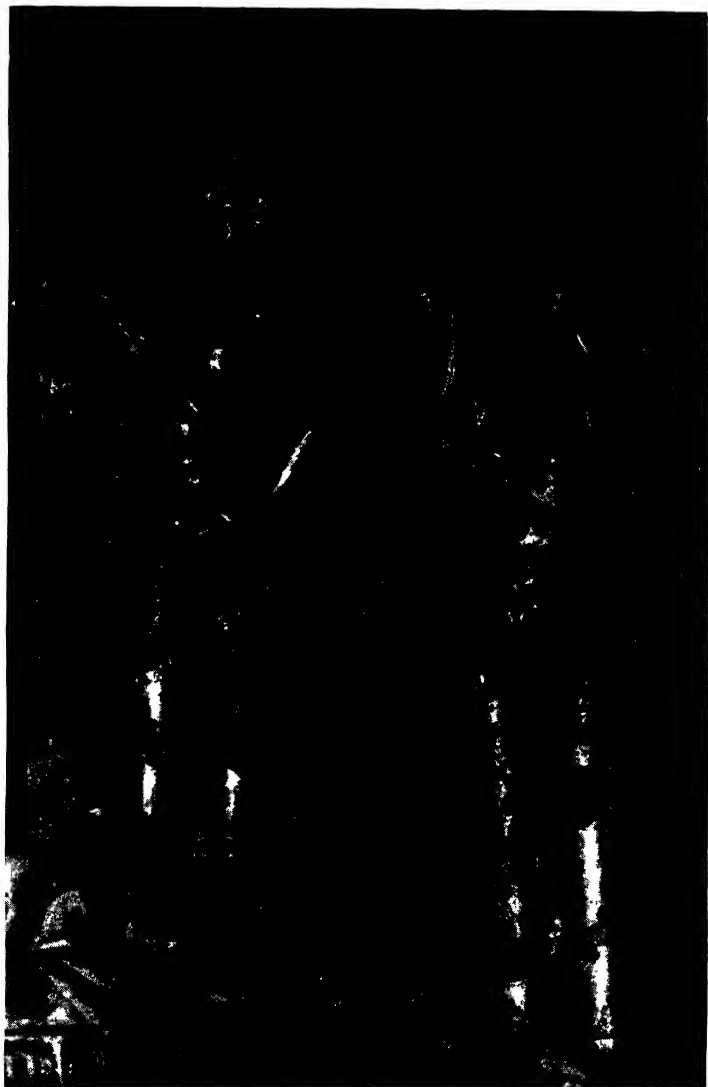
A sharp interminable ascent and then a terrific descent into the valley of Toshang, where we at last find a little water. The march has been rather long and wearing.

At Toshang<sup>1</sup> there are now only two houses, but on the lofty eminence which overlooks them two temples, a castle and a long line of immense *chortèn*.

All is abandonment and ruin.

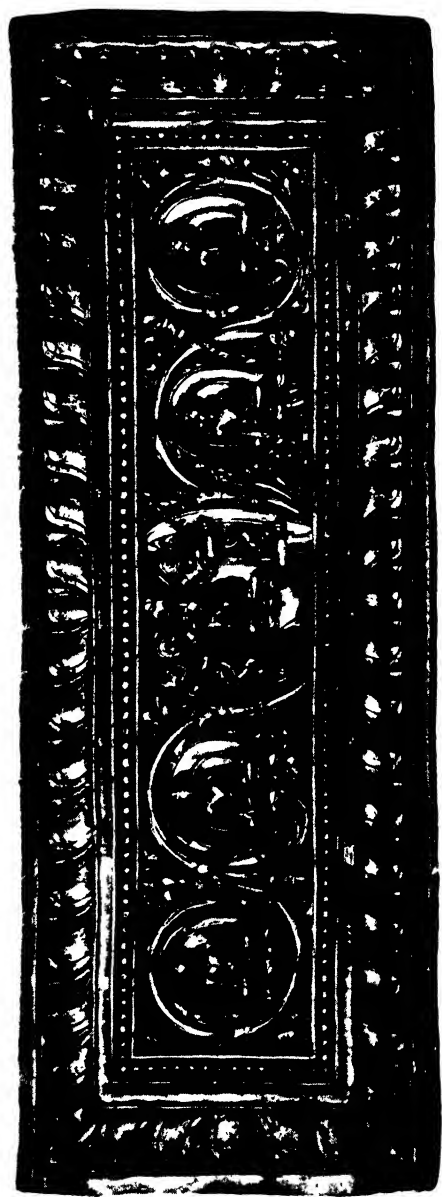
We climb up to the *Lha k'añ*, the old one; the new one which with its white plastered walls stands lower down we are not able to visit. There is installed in it a terrific deity, and by order of the Khampo of Toling it is opened only once a year, with special rites and propitiatory ceremonies. It does not matter much, because it is evident that the structure is not old.

<sup>1</sup> In the manuscripts, *do ñañ*.



TEMPLE AT TOSHANG. DETAIL OF THE INTERIOR

*Facing p 182*



COVERING FOR MANUSCRIPT IN CARVED WOOD WITH FIGURES OF THE SUPREME PENTAD

The *Lha k'an* which we visit is called the *Lha k'an* of the *Lotsāva*; that is, tradition attributes it to *Rin c'en bzai po*. And indeed the plan also carries us back to the earliest times of the Buddhistic revival in the land of Guge. There remain only great stucco statues—*Śākyamuni* seated in the middle, *Maitreya* and *Mañjuśrī*, *Padmapāṇi* and *Vajrapāṇi* standing at his two sides. On the walls, well preserved frescoes which worthily continue the artistic traditions already admired at Toling and Tsaparang. On the left, four gods of medicine and *Amitābha*; on the right, four other gods of medicine and *Maitreya*; at the sides of the door, two terrifying divinities—*Gonpò ciagdrùg* (*mgon po p'yag drug*) and *Gigcèd* (*ajigs byed*).

Above the larger figures and in the free spaces, each in a medallion, the Buddha and Masters.

The pictures beyond doubt are as old as the sixteenth century. In a heap near the altar the last fragments of a *Kanghiür* manuscript, one of the many copies which we have found in this district; the same writing, the same antique spelling; here and there some of those boards which serve as coverings for the voluminous tomes of the "great mother", the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the mystic Sophia, finely carved with images of the supreme pentad.

The temple is in the hands of two ignorant monks who can neither read nor write; not only political dissolution but also cultural degeneration are effacing the very last traces of this people and its glories.

The exploration of the *chortèn*, carried out with great care, gives us a large number of leaves of doctrinal texts, especially of the *Tanghiür*, all of them covered with interlined notes and glosses; for the most part they are anterior to the fifteenth century.



We are anxious to go to-morrow to Khartze, the situation of which we have at last discovered; it is here in Lomè and was the place where, according to the biography, *Rin c'en bzai po* passed a great part of his life, translating into Tibetan the masterpieces of the dogma and the mysticism of the *Mahāyāna* from which he expected the spiritual renascence of his country.

But our informants are all agreed in saying that the caravan cannot go as far as Khartze, so impossible is the road; and they advise us to try from Puling which is the route usually followed.

26th September, Puling.

We ascend the course of the Toshang river as far as certain ruins of another *gompà* about two miles to the south, where we find *ts'a ts'a*, manuscripts and fragments of stucco statues in one general heap. Then the road ascends as an arduous track which climbs in tortuous fashion over the side of a clayey hill. Fortunately, the rise seems to be short and the pass close at hand. But after one ridge, behold another and then still another; at noon we are still climbing. Then a boundless plain, with occasional shrubs and a little brushwood, stunted and prickly; it is evident, however, that they bring sheep up here to pasture and that they are afraid of wolves. This we learn from a big hole not very deep and slightly conical in shape; at the bottom is a jumble of bones. It is a trap; they throw into it a dead sheep; the wolf leaps in and is unable to get out again, for the sides, converging towards the aperture, do not afford him foothold for climbing, and the opening is too far above for him to manage to leap to it.

When they succeed in catching a wolf the whole countryside makes holiday.

We call to mind that while we were encamped at Shipki we heard towards evening a great uproar of trumpets and clarions, and saw appear in the distance two men preceded by a small band of three or four boys; one of the men carried his gun over his shoulder, the other an old wolf slung across his back and transfixed by a big stick. Behind came a crowd of people who with shouting and clapping were urging on two or three sheep to make them keep pace with the company. They had killed a wolf which had been ravaging the flocks, and had then made a tour of all the villages to announce the glad news and collect the much-coveted reward—one sheep per village.

After this endless plateau, a diabolical descent to Puling; few houses, and signs of great poverty. But the terraced fields, well irrigated and well tilled, are numerous; to work them they use implements made of wood.

Near us is encamped a *Sa skya pa* Lama who is going on pilgrimage into India; he lives in a capacious and well-furnished tent. He has wives and sons; he occupies the leisure part of his time in reading and meditating.

He is not only a pilgrim but a merchant; this combination of two professions apparently opposite, in one and the same person, is very common in Tibet, where there is a proverb which says—"first he was a priest, now he has become a merchant." There is not one priest, *skushok*, or ascetic who does not possess an innate sense of trading. The Tibetan is frugal, parsimonious, and by nature, saving; he loves hoarding.

However, conversations with this Lama are of the most interesting character; he is very learned and very well provided with books; some of these are rare; a liturgy of the cult of *Vaiṣṛavana*, very important also

from the iconographic point of view, interests us particularly; after long bargaining we succeed in buying it from him.

He wishes to see our *rukièn*; he takes hold of it with the utmost reverence and places it on the heads of his wife and every one of the family in order that contact with the sacred ornament may load them with blessings; it is the *chinlàb* (*byin brlabs*).

Even here at Puling they say that the road to Khartze is very difficult; besides, the few families are living on the *dok* and the village is completely uninhabited.

We resolve to send our Lama, an intelligent and capable man; he will have to set out early to-morrow together with a caravan-man and a guide, go to the *dok*, seek out the keeper of the temple at Khartze, take him to the place and rejoin us at Sarang, after having copied such inscriptions as may still remain, and studied well the *gompà* in all its details.

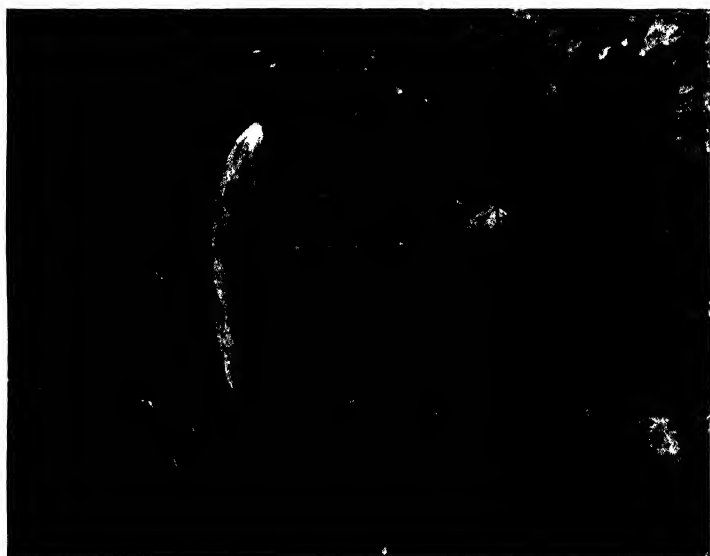
We learn meanwhile that at Khartze there is a *ghialpò*, a king, who is now reduced to the humble condition of a shepherd; but he must be the descendant of an ancient family which held the village in tenure and was perhaps a branch from the royal house of Guge.

This would seem to be indicated by certain manuscripts which, late in the evening, some boys from Puling bring to us.

27th September, Op.

Rildigang is far away and the road is difficult. One cannot reach it in less than two marches.

The road runs to the west from Puling and for several miles skirts a river which we do not see marked on the map; then it climbs to a vast tableland and unwinds over gently undulating country. At 5 p.m., after a long, wearisome march, we camp in a cold damp



WOODEN AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS



TEMPLE AT RI. FRESCO REPRESENTING TSON K'A PA

hollow facing the Op (as this river also is called) and the pass of Rildigang which rises with precipitous walls.

The landscape is absolutely different from that which we have left; to the sandy wastes and crumbling mounds of clay, corroded, yellowish, there succeed sharp-edged ridges, perpendicular rocks, dark forbidding mountains. We are near the chain of the Zanskar.

*28th September, Rildigang.*

Down precipitously to the Op; then painfully up the slope with frequent halts, for the horses are now at the limit of their strength and the ascent is steep.

At 2 p.m. we are at Rildigang;<sup>1</sup> a few houses and a small temple in the midst of well-irrigated fields. It is an alpine village all hemmed in by mountains and gorges. The people are very rough and unapproachable; the stranger is for them a new and rare thing.

We go up to the little *gompà*; as guide we have the village doctor, completely enveloped in his dark red cassock, and a small crowd of women and children follow us. The temple is a small chapel, very old and quite covered with frescoes which are blackened with smoke and rather coarse.

On the altar is an ivory statue of *Avalokiteśvara*, very fine and very well worth notice; we remind ourselves that among the images deposited by *Rin c'en bzai po* in the temple of his native village of Radnis there is also a statue of the "Great Compassionate One" in ivory. Radnis is relatively near. Is there some connexion between the two statues?

*29th September, Ri.*

The march to Ri is long; the road rises continuously up to a lofty pass almost opposite to Gumphug; we

<sup>1</sup>In some manuscripts, *ril ti sgañ*.

have a good view from a hollow of the gigantic rock on which stands out white the little hermitage directly above the Sulej; we proceed then towards the south-west, and, having crossed the pass, which must be between 4800 and 5000 metres high, we discover the ice-clad peaks of the Purgul, which, crystalline and sparkling, cut the blue brilliance of the sky. Ri faces us; a great village which in a straggling way covers with the green of its fields a fertile hollow, at the far end of which opens a gigantic gateway.

The huge wall has been cleft with a clean cut; through the gap are seen in the distance the fields of Bekhar.

We encamp about 4 p.m.

Ri is a very ancient place; on the map it is called Richoba, which is a mistake, because Richoba is the name of a family in the village, the richest and most influential, which practically rules the place; a family of astrologers who for centuries have exercised this trade, perhaps even at the court of the kings of Guge; they are called Joba, hence the name "the Joba of Ri", given to their family and erroneously attributed to the village.

There is a real *gompà*, a monastery which comprises various temples and chapels and in which lives a certain number of monks in dependence on Toling.

Already they have been informed of our arrival and they come to meet us in a rather suspicious and diffident manner; this region to the south of the Sulej, far from the caravan routes, isolated amongst savage mountains, is decidedly more uncivilized than the other provinces.

But when they see that on every altar we place an offering of one rupee for the sacred lamp, not only do they open to us the doors of all the temples of the *gompà*, but the laymen—even the superb astrologer—lead us forcibly to see their private chapels; there comes a

moment when, a little because of weariness, a little on account of economy, we have to put an end to this frantic hospitality.

The larger temple, higher up, is attributed to *Rin c'en bzai po*, and is the very one of which the biography speaks; it is approaching complete destruction. There remain stucco statues of the sacred pentad, having in the centre the image of *Sarvavid Vairocana* with four heads, white in colour; every deity is seated on the traditional lotus flower supported on a throne on which are carved the animals characteristic of each god.

The same stucco halo that we have seen since we left Tabo in all the oldest temples in the region.

On the walls frescoes of the Buddhas of the *Bhad-rakalpa* and the deities who compose the cycle of the *Kun rig*, that is, of *Sarvavid Vairocana*.

This temple might once upon a time have borne comparison very well with those of Toling and Tsaparang, but, as we said a little while ago, it is on the way to irreparable ruin.

We find further magnificent evidence of the pictorial art of Guge on the walls of the *Goncàn (mgon k'añ)*; rather refined, they represent perhaps the last creations of a school which, owing to the political decay of the country and the vanished liberality of the princes, was destined to become exhausted and to disappear.

We note one *Tsoñ k'a pa*, the eight gods of medicine, *Śākyamuni*, the symbolical union of the *Guhyasamāja*.

The other two temples, the *Tashigephèl (bkra šis dge ap'el)* and the *Surma (gsur ma)* possess no special interest; the last is perhaps only a cell for meditation belonging to some famous Lama.

We return to the camp, passing close to the huge *lhato* placed on an elevation of the ground almost in the



middle of the village; it is all painted in vivid red and at the corners carries branches and flags.

It is the dreaded and venerated abode of the *sa-bdag*, the *genius loci* who, they say, is called *Rolpa*. These indigenous gods carry us back to prehistoric time; they are so rooted in the religious consciousness of the people that not even Buddhism has succeeded in replacing them, but has received them into its pantheon, transfiguring them and often ameliorating their rites.

30th September, Sarang.

Before we strike camp the astrologer's wife arrives, in a great rage, to denounce our caravan-men. It is harvest time and the people are working late threshing the barley and stacking the straw, singing and drinking *chàn*. They have gone on till dawn; we have heard them very well, for when they sing they put all their breath into it. It appears that some of our men have profited by the unusual good nature of certain peasant girls and by these magnificent starlit nights. We do not know what to say, and, for the purpose of preserving our dignity, we reply to the old woman that we will punish the culprits. But we are somewhat surprised by the modesty and indignation of the noble Tibetan lady, for generally speaking the Tibetans close an eye on such doings; one knows that in a place where polyandry prevails one must not be too delicately particular.

Our road to-day runs southward, and, having crossed an easy pass, descends to the monastery of Chusu. This is built on a gigantic hill which falls to the river Sarang, and it thus stands directly opposite Bekhar, but it is not really on the same bank as this village, as might seem from the map.

This *gompà* also is dependent on Toling; it is half

broken down and abandoned. There is as keeper a solitary Lama who lives in the hamlet close by here. Posted on the perpendicular rock we begin to shout like madmen to make him come up; but we have to do it loud and long before he understands.

He mounts the slope very, very slowly, and with ill-will opens the *gompà* to us. Two small temples. The lower contains a large quantity of books and manuscripts flung carelessly together. For the most part they are fragments of a *Kanghiür* of the same type as those which we have seen throughout all Guge.

On the walls frescoes, perhaps of the fifteenth or sixteenth century, with the usual clear patina; we see a *Tson k'a pa*, the gods of medicine, and on a long band which runs round the three walls, the life of the Buddha portrayed in a series of successive scenes.

Numbers of statuettes on the altars and in the corners, *thanika* rolled together and thrown on the floor. A desolation.

The other temple is rather the chapel of some Lama; it is up above on the terrace of the *gompà*. There is nothing particularly noteworthy, except perhaps some statues and *thanika* and a splendid view which we enjoy from the small window near the altar. Here again the *thanika* all possess the characteristic style of Guge, a school standing by itself which, in the course of our journey, we have been able to study thoroughly, to individualize, to trace back to its Indian prototypes, and which one of us will shortly reconstruct in all its details, its development and its meaning.

We take leave of our guide, who goes by the name of a Lama and who seems quite destitute of sense; and then down a rocky incline through the few houses of the village of Chusu to the Sarang river.

There is no bridge; a somewhat turbulent ford. Then up the steep slope, intersected by the terraced fields of Sarang, which succeed each other like so many green steps.

Servants of the petty king of the district come to meet us and offer us two horses to make the last stage of the ascent.

But we said, before our departure, that we would make the whole of our journey on foot and we mean to keep our word.

No news of our Lama, who should have returned to-day from Khartze.

In the evening there arrives the girl who had been the cause of the scandal at Ri; other women accompany her. We expect more trouble. A great amount of talk between her and the guilty one; we understand; all this to-do is because our man has wanted to get rid of her. Four annas disbursed unwillingly put matters right. And all night, in the encampment, goes on a great singing of women and men.

1st October.

We pay a visit. We go down to the *Pobràn* (*p'o brañ*), to the dwelling, that is, in which lives the king of Sarang; he is not really a king, though sometimes the people call him *ghialpò*; his true title is that of *rupòn* (*rus dpoñ*) which is a military rank, corresponding to our colonel. In any case he is lord of the place, nominal lord of course, because the supreme authority here belongs to Lhasa and its official representatives, i.e. *Garpòn* and *Zonpòn*.

He receives us in a room on the second floor, hung with printed stuff brought from India; the usual discourses, the usual ceremonial.

It makes us laugh to see that cylindrical cap of his above his not very intelligent face. It appears that he has some ancient documents and we ask for them; yes, he preserves them, but he cannot show them to us. This refusal is intended to display his orthodoxy in the presence of the priest, his minister and his servants; he must live in great subjection to his Lama, an asthmatic old man who follows his master like a shadow, and who has come, early this morning, to the camp to get medical advice.

However he sends for the custodian of the temples of Sarang and orders him to show them to us. There are two temples and both are under Toling. The priest who has charge of them is in rags, is as old as Methuselah, and does not appear to understand much. One of the chapels is fairly old; decaying pictures of the seventeenth century, with the usual *Sākyamuni*, the gods of medicine, *Amitāyus*, and in a long band the legend of the Buddha.

The other is consecrated to the terrorizing deities—*Vajrabhairava* and his acolytes; it must be more recent than the first. In front of us, on the other side of the river, in a wild and rocky gorge, are visible a touch of green and one or two houses; they are the fields of Kapra with a small temple of *Rin c'en bzang po*.

Meanwhile our thoughts go back to the documents and the ancient letters which the *Rupön* says he keeps in his house; they might be of great value, and in any case we ought to see them.

We entrust to the *lamberdär* the task of persuading the princelet; late in the afternoon we see him approaching the camp together with his two faithful officials. Assuming a mysterious air he asks us to go into the tent; after peeping through the opening to make sure no one is looking he draws forth from under his cloak a great

roll. He unrolls it and shows it to us; it is a decree from Lhasa of about 1700, in which there is granted to his family in tenure the village of Sarang. It all reduces to this.

When he takes leave we give him a fair sum of money which he accepts very coolly. Indeed, he lets us know through the *lamberdâr* that he was expecting more; but in reply we inform him that we have two tariffs—one for viewing only and one for photographing. He had refused to allow us to photograph his document.

At night-fall our Lama arrives bringing the information about Khartze; a single temple like that at Toshang under the jurisdiction of the *Sa skya pa* monastery of Dunkar.

We would much prefer to follow the Sutlej until we arrive at Radnis, the native village of *Rin c'en bzang po*; then from there to ford the Sutlej and rejoin at Tiak the caravan route which we have already traversed. But everyone advises us against taking this route; the Sutlej is still unfordable and no caravan can pass by way of Serkung.

So we are obliged to resume the old road to the Shirang-la.

*2nd October, Tinzam.*

To-day's route has been long and tiring. We have passed under Bekhar (and not Biar as in the maps)<sup>1</sup> and, having crossed the river by a frail wooden bridge, whilst the caravan used the ford, we have climbed up a pass which seemed as if it would never end. Then a gently undulating plain and a precipitous descent to the Tinzam bridge.

We have arrived late; here at the bridge it seems to be night, so narrow is the space on which we have

<sup>1</sup> In the manuscripts, *bye mk'ar*.

to pitch our tents and so closely are we hemmed in with vertical rocks.

Tumultuous and foaming the Sutlej rushes along a few metres below us, shaking with thunderous boom the rocky walls. If the weather did not remain fine we should be in terror of the huge walls which overhang us, lest they should split apart and shower on us gigantic rock masses.

There is no pasture for the animals; they have to lead them up again to near the top of the pass which we have crossed, but even there the brushwood is scanty and of poor quality.

The path by which we must climb up to-morrow we have seen in front of us whilst we were descending into this hole—a track which winds up precipitous declivities, suggesting the climbing of a wall. Our cook, who is walking in front of us, stops in amazement to look at the road which is pointed out to him for to-morrow and stands struck dumb shaking his head. The caravan-men, who have a wide knowledge of the Himalayas, all hold the worst opinions concerning the road surfaces of Tibet and the hardships of this region.

*3rd October.*

We have climbed up or rather we have crawled up to the Shirang-la; hour after hour of weariness; it has often been necessary to put four people to the hauling up of the horses.

It is almost night when, having crossed the Shirang-la, we encamp on the grassy hollow which stretches below the pass, where we halted on the way out. The place is known by the name of *Man sang*. From Sarang we have re-entered Ronchung, as all this part of Tibet is called, beginning at the pass of Shipki.

*4th October, Shipki.*

We are on the caravan route which we traversed on our outward journey; men and things are already known to us. At Tiak we have to leave three horses so exhausted and helpless that they could not take another step.

Between Tiak and Shipki the descent is harder than the ascent.

On the steepest of the rocks we have the baggage carried on men's shoulders, enlisting a score of men. The horses swim the Sutlej, which, though the season is already advanced, is very deep, rapid and violent.

We arrive at Shipki at nightfall.

*5th October, Namgia.*

We are on the Shipki pass; a glorious day. To our right the gigantic rocks of the Purgyul tower over the river in vertical precipices, and in the turquoise blue of the sky sparkle its glaciers. We turn towards it to give one more salute to the country which, with such varied adventures, we have traversed; to the east the blue chain of the Shirang bars the horizon and appears to close this wild ocean of hills and valleys in which the Sutlej is engulfed.

We salute perhaps for the last time this country which is dying; an immense cemetery, from which the desert, as it creeps forward, is destroying and effacing all traces of life. But we are comforted by the thought that we have arrived in time to save at least partial records of its past and the surviving evidence of its glories.

Kalil also looks at this array of mountains which we have scaled and penetrated in all directions, and he prays to his God that never again will he send him to a land so bare, so desolate, so cruel.

All life becomes wearisome and heavy when the flame of enthusiasm does not animate and comfort us.

*7th-8th October, Dabling.*

We leave Namgia for Dabling. It is a fair-sized village on the left bank of the Sutlej, but little known because it is off the road usually followed.

We go and visit an old friend of Tucci's, who is the last descendant of an ancient family of Lamas and possesses a rich library of Buddhistic books; this idea of ours has been excellent.

The private chapel, which we investigate with meticulous care, contains, heaped together in a mass, hundreds of texts—manuscript for the most part; canonical, liturgical, mystical works, exegeses and glosses. We find amongst others a series of comments on the six laws of *Nāropā* which even to-day are used as a guide in the ascetic practices of the Tibetan sages, and which aim at producing those phenomena of voluntary hyperpyrexia known under the name of *tummo*, and also aim at acquiring by rapid means the supreme illumination. Then there is a series of treatises on the *Dohākoṣa*, a vast mystic literature, written originally in certain mediæval dialects of India, in which the *Mahāyānic* schools have reached their loftiest expression, esoteric and initiatory.

They are very ancient manuscripts, perhaps of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in minute cursive characters, with glosses and marginal notes. They are of the utmost importance for the full understanding in their intimate content, of the mysticism and asceticism of Buddhism, and they enable us to penetrate behind the veil of strange expressions, into the hidden significance of the most noble systems of spiritual elevation.



The manuscripts are so numerous, so mixed up and tossed about, that we need two whole days to make a choice of what interests us.

9th-12th October, Poo.

The march from Dabling to Poo is short. By way of a wide, solid bridge we recross to the right bank of the Sutlej, and at last climb up to the village, one of the largest in Northern Bashahr. We now feel at home. The *Zialdar* comes to meet us with signs of pleasure; he is an active and healthy old man of whom every traveller who has known him has said or written something, always complimentary. The stay at Poo cannot be brief; we have to re-organize the caravan, replace the animals now unfit to proceed and re-arrange the baggage.

Moreover, Poo, and generally speaking the whole of Northern Kunāvar, like all border places, is of extreme interest, and, although Moravian missionaries have been here for a long time, is still little known.

The people are polyglot; they speak Tibetan very well and know also a little Hindu—the men, that is to say, who are always moving about for trading purposes. But every village has its own special dialect, which is the purely local variety of one single language—Kunāvari, which begins near Sarahan and dies out, one might say, at Poo.

This language, though largely influenced by Tibetan, still betrays in its grammatical structure its *munda* origin. So also with the religion. The most ancient aboriginal cults are grafted on the ruling Lamaism; non-Buddhistic divinities are even to-day venerated as tutelary patrons of various villages. Practices and liturgies often in absolute contrast with Buddhism were vigorous up to recent times; thus, for example, human sacrifices were

common enough once in the valley of the Sutlej. So were agricultural rites which demanded holocausts of victims. There exists a mass of beliefs, the origin of which is lost in the night of time, and which Buddhistic missionaries included generically in the term "Bon", the religion which preceded theirs in Tibet. One understands therefore how *Rin c'en bzan po* built such a large number of monasteries in this land, which in his time must have been in dependence on the kings of Guge, almost like so many tentacles of the faith by which he hoped to ennoble the country—Poo, Shasu, Charang, Sangla, Rippa. One understands also the importance of collecting and studying what remains of the ancient beliefs, which, as we have said above, are continually yielding ground to the renewed missionary ardour of Lamaism in the northern part, and of Hinduism in the southern part of these regions.

Traces of the cults remain in the annual festivals celebrated after the harvest, or in the thanksgiving ceremonies for the birth of the first-born son; here at Poo, in the consecration of the *Shar-rgan*, which Francke has mentioned, which takes place about November.

The ceremony is carried out, or to put it better, directed (for almost the whole population of Poo takes part in it) by a leader called *scianlön* (*žan blon*). Waving a bundle of peacocks' feathers, he starts the various *tempi* of the dance, which is performed rhythmically by the crowd singing in chorus and usually arranged in alternate lines of men and women.

The dancing-place is called *dogra* or *dogmo*; it is a wide space in the corner of which is set up a large monolith.

The purpose of the ceremonies is to maintain the fertilizing power of nature, to promote a high rate of

reproduction in animals and to invoke the benediction of the gods that they may extend the scope of good and destroy the influence of evil forces.

The hymns sung at these festivals are very difficult because there is interspersed among the Tibetan words a large number of local expressions and obsolete modes of speech which can no longer be understood. We become aware of this when we get to come to us two Lamas and the *scianlön* in person, in order that they may explain to us the copied manuscript. Often the same sentence is given three totally different interpretations, and, as far as we can see, not one of the three is very plausible. In any case, these songs are of the greatest interest on account of the linguistic and religious stratification which they present; alongside the doctrines of the Buddha and the supreme law place is given to the Bon as in the teaching of *Can rgan Apo*, and *Kesar* is recorded as the protector of strong young men.

The hymns conclude with a long list of deities who are the protectors or the patrons of villages or of simple places, mountains, rivers and bridges—the sole survival of an aboriginal religion now almost completely vanished.

The central deity is evidently the *Grablà* (*sgrab Lha*, or *dgrab lha*) the patron of Poo and of Kanam, because everyone of these villages still preserves its tutelary gods. We find—*Tañ ta hru* at Lippa, *Gyan ma gyon* at Jangi (in Tibetan spelling, *Gyañ riñ*), *Man lañ* at Rogi, *Pa t'o ro* at Rarang, *Or mi hru* at Morang, *K'or mo hru* at Rispa, *Še še riñ* at Pangī (in Tibetan spelling, *Pañ riñ*), *Bi šu žu* at Chini. All are included and invoked in the litanies which the priests of the various temples recite in the daily ceremonies from one end to the other of Kunāvar.

13th October, Kanam.

Kanam is a celebrated place; in one of its modest monasteries there lived for some time the pioneer of Tibetan studies, Csoma de Kőrös, who, having left Hungary at the age of twenty-four, traversed on foot a great part of Europe and Asia, and who arrived in this country instigated by the desire to find in Central Asia the origins of the Hungarian language. In the small temple called *Kanghiür lacàn* (*bka' agyur Lha k'añ*) are still to be seen, disposed in a disorderly fashion on the shelves of an old library, the huge tomes of the *Kanghiür* on which he worked so devotedly in the compilation of his analysis of the Buddhistic canon, which even to-day stands as a fundamental work.

Higher up is the *gompà* attributed to *Rin c'en bzai po*; modernized and rebuilt it preserves nothing more of the ancient edifice than the plan.

There are few monks, and those belonging to the place are possessed of little learning; but there are two or three who have come from Central Tibet; and to sanctify the province a celebrated *Ghesè* (*dGe šes*) of Tashilunpo who has taken up his abode in a hermitage above the village. The presence of these holy ones kindles new enthusiasm for the faith in the believers, who, here still more than at Poo, practise a hybrid religion which, strictly speaking, can no longer be called Lamaism.

At the very moment at which we are entering the village, a great hubbub attracts our attention. On the terrace of one house there is gathered together a great number of people, and on the slopes of the hill which overlooks it is collected the whole village. There has been born in that house the first male child; they have brought there the image of the god in order to thank

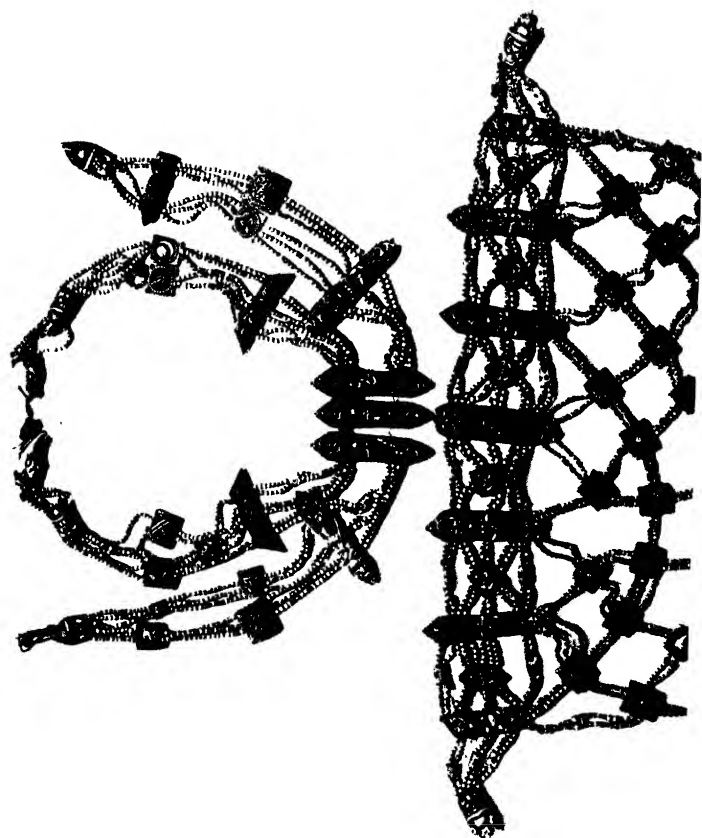
him, to invoke his blessing, and to seek from him an answer concerning the future destiny of the new-born; the *Grablà*, as the protector of Kanam is called, is represented by a kind of palanquin on the sides of which are applied as many faces of beaten silver; it is surmounted by a very thick reddish bunch of hair and is supported on two bamboo poles which permit the priests to carry it here and there as they please.

There is commencing the ritual dance, which is performed according to three *tempi* one after the other. In the first, men and women form a sort of chain holding each other's hands behind their backs; they sing in chorus, led in the movements of the dance and in the song by a chorus-master who goes in front of them waving in the air a great fan very like a fly-flap. The people are arranged in two lines facing each other and the dance takes the form of little swaying movements, now forward now backward, now to the right now to the left.

After a brief stop there begins the second *tempo* in which the rhythm of the dance and the song is more animated and the people make a chain with the alternate hands in front. Another halt, and then dance and song are resumed with a rhythm accelerated till almost orgiastic.

The image of the god is now raised by its bearers, and it also begins a furious dance with bounds and frightful shakings and sudden arrests and frenzied resumptions, which send into wild undulations the disordered red hair.

It is not the bearers—so it is believed—who make the god dance, but he who shakes them and incites them; when the dance is at its most furious stage, then is the moment for the response. The priest, called *grogs*, flings some grains of barley into the air and lets them fall back



RUKIEN MADE WITH CARVED HUMAN BONES



CARVED COLUMN. HIMALAYAN ART

on the palm of his open, extended hand; if the grains are unequal in number, it is a good sign; if equal, it is the worst.

Throughout the whole night there reach our ears, in the serene stillness of the camp, the ceremonial chants, which in a short time assume a rather licentious character.

In some folios which the Lamas of the place bring to us we find a genealogical list of the kings of Bashahr, which we may be able to check in part with the epigraphic dates collected from many *mañi*, and with those chronological indications contained in the dedications of various manuscripts. They bring us also to look at various *rukièn*, which, however, offer no special interest either artistic or iconographic.

14th-16th October, Chini.

We pass through Jangi and Pangi and at 4 p.m. arrive at Chini. More than two hundred kilometres still separate us from Simla, but we feel as if we have already arrived.

Already we perceive the nearness of India; the very landscape is different from that which we have traversed. Deodars and pines, which have made their first timid appearance at Kanam, are multiplied into immense forests which cover with a varied scale of green the rocky flanks of the mountains.

In front of us, on the left bank of the Sutlej, the Raldang and the Castle Rock, an enormous massif known also by the name of the Indian *Kailāsa*, thrust their adamantine peaks towards the sky.

All this part of the state of Bashahr is now usually known by the name of Kunāvar; but, according to local traditions, it is subdivided into different zones each of which has its own particular designation; the district



on the left of the Sutlej is called *Rupà* (*gru dpag*); all the territory beyond Poo towards Western Tibet and Spiti, *Ganràn* (*Gan ran*); from Rogi to Poo, *Shuà* (*Šu a*); from Pangl to Rogi, *Obù* (*ho bu*), the extreme limit of Buddhistic evangelization in the times of the first kings of Guge.

Lamaistic Buddhism comes no farther than here; there is just a small temple which tradition regards as old but which does not seem to be. All around, however, there still lives the memory of *Rin c'en bzän po*. At Rarang the people show, even to-day, the rock where the saint left his marks when he tried to convert to Buddhism the people of Rippa on the opposite bank of the Sutlej; the latter refused to learn from him and tried to kill him; he saved himself by flight through the air and by alighting exactly at Rarang, on a great rock on which he placed his footprints as a record of the miracle.

Here then the reign of Lamaism is dying out and is being lost in Hinduism; as in Northern Kunāvar the aboriginal gods have assumed Buddhistic dress and names, so here they have been welcomed into the immense Hindu pantheon and are assimilated now to those deities—*Śiva* or *Viṣṇu*, *Kālī* or *Durgā*.

The temples are no longer as smiling as the Buddhistic *Lacàn*; no longer are they the gay white buildings with the long red streamer which crowns their summit and the doors easy to open to show their meditating Buddhas and their Lamas absorbed in prayer. Wooden edifices, full of mysteries, impenetrable, severe; on the panels of the walls, on the pilasters, at the angles of the roofs, strange figures and new symbols. Religion is no longer as serene as in Lamaism; the deity is no longer regarded as a comfort and a guide, but as a force which transcends evil and good, implacable and deadly.



DETAIL OF THE TEMPLE OF VISNU AT CHINI



HIMALAYAN ART. ŚIVA AND PĀRVATI

The temples are ornamented now in their most minute details.

Here we are able to study at our ease splendid examples of this Himalayan art which is still waiting for someone to trace out and illustrate its developments and its history. Primitive and childish almost in its representation of the human figure, it lavishes itself in floral and geometric ornamentation, which spreads over all free spaces and is multiplied in volutes and bands of great decorative effectiveness.

The temple of *Viṣṇu* at Chini, with the large square where the people hold their sacred dances and the music pavilion, is one of the most beautiful examples of this Himalayan art, together with the other characteristic of *Mahādeva* at Sungra.

We find here features of that pagoda style of architecture which will be seen to have its maximum development in the Nepalese temples with gilded roofs; these some consider to be a derivation from the Chinese style. To us these also seem to constitute rather the point of arrival of an architectural type which we will call generically "Himalayan", probably originating in these houses having roof-coverings of great slabs of stone which, superposed one on the other and projecting beyond the walls, give rise to a slightly arched outline.

The four angles of the roof are frequently turned upwards and terminate in pendant ornaments such as bells or lamps; perhaps also they reproduce models originating in pavilions, in which the statues of divinities were exposed under great canopies of cloth mounted on branches which bent under the weight.

Other wooden carvings which we have found in the temples of Chini would seem to indicate all this clearly enough; we remember, for example, a carved wooden

panel in the neighbourhood of Chini, which represents *Śiva* and *Pārvatī*, and in which the shape of the roof recalls the appearance of hanging curtains.

Neither is there wanting in some cells the prototype of the double roof which becomes normal or is even multiplied in Nepal; on the first roof, wide and sloping, is supported, a little higher, the second.

We collect a fair amount of photographic material for comparison, which will enable us one day to discuss this question again, with greater amplitude.

18th October—2nd November, Simla.

We are at the end of the journey. The march proceeds uneventfully to Simla, where we arrive on 2nd November.

On the far horizon is outlined the group of the Indian *Kailāsa* which the people of the place call the *Panghi-ṅangi*. We see group behind group of gigantic peaks which cleave with their white crests the intense purity of the blue sky; an immense barrier, beyond which we have thrust ourselves in order to bring back to knowledge—with some success—the glories of a people who once were familiar with splendours of art and thought.

We salute those mountains with a sense of sadness and homesickness; but we are comforted by the thought that for a few days we shall still be in the midst of the Himalayas, in that valley of Nepal where fortunate conditions of climate and favourable historic events have preserved, in the old manuscripts written on palm leaves, some of the most important evidence of Buddhistic thought, which otherwise would have been irretrievably lost.





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